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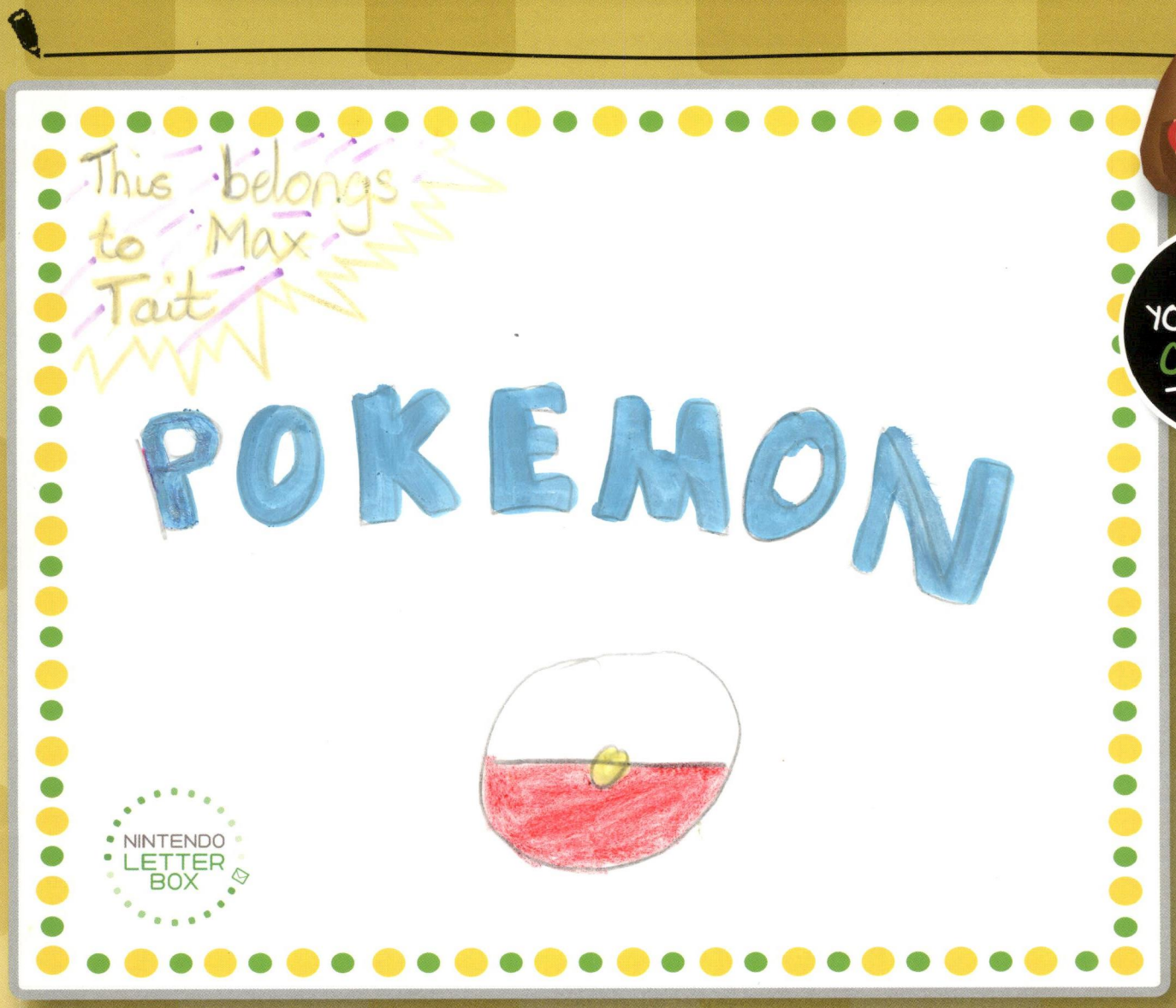

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Nintendo Letter Box!

Have you tried it yet? Draw your own Letter Box cover here and win awesome prizes! love Nikki xxx

Mario Tennis | Pandora's Tower | Kingdom Hearts

The rules have changed!

FOUR PLAYERS, ONE VEHICLE

Take turns leading the party as you travel around boards together. Chart your own path to victory and land others in trouble!

OVER 80 MINIGAMES

The fun keeps coming with dozens of minigames that use simple controls. Find treasure, race snowmobiles, solve puzzles and much more

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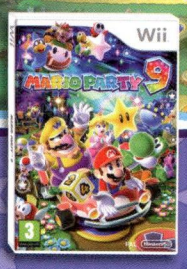
Team up with your fellow players to battle bosses. Will you land the finishing blow and bag extra Mini Stars?



Wii™

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Issue 81 / May 2012

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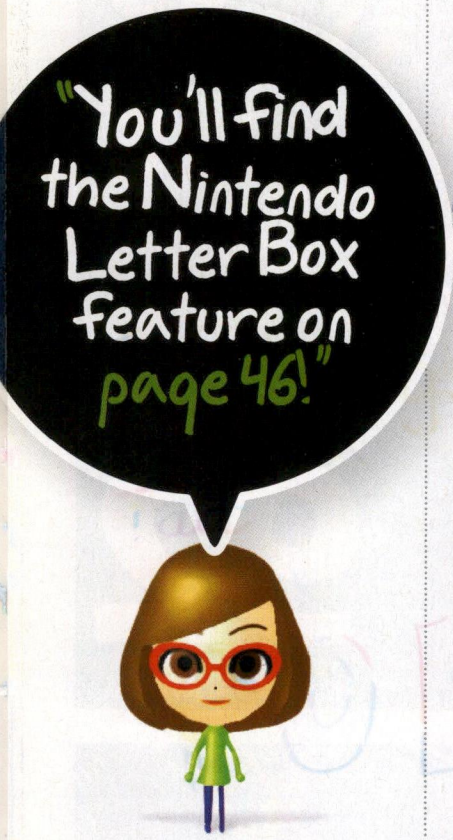
Welcome



There's nothing quite as magical as receiving a letter. Well, at least not until you hit your 20s and they all become bills and menus for dodgy Chinese restaurants. *Nintendo Letterbox* on the 3DS, on the other hand, reminds us of the simple, forgotten delight of receiving doodled correspondance from a dear friend. That's why we've dedicated a chunk of this issue to singing its praises. Inside you'll also find our review of gory RPG *Pandora's Tower*, as well as a massive hands-on with the excellent *Kingdom Hearts 3DS*. It's a packed issue, so put your reading boots on and enjoy!

Neil

Editor in Chief
Neil Long

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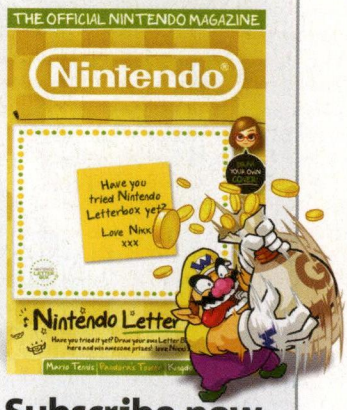

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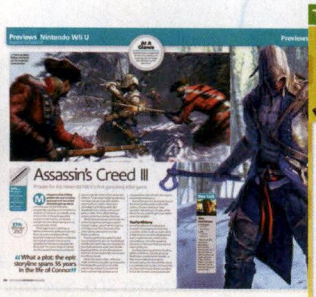
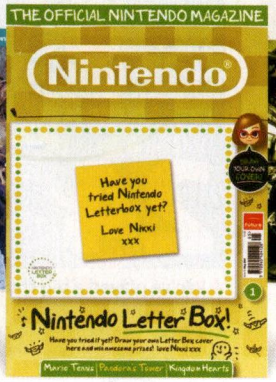
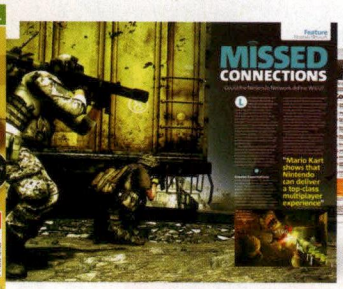


Page 40 *Assassin's Creed III* could be a day-one Wii U classic.





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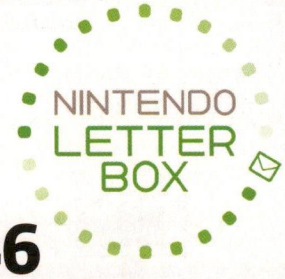

NINTENDO LETTER BOX

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Yet to download *Nintendo Letter Box*? Read our guide to see why you should.

Nintendo®

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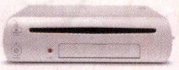
Key Colours

Wii = Blue

DSi = Pink

3DS = Red



Wii U = Aqua Blue

Gold Award

The **ONM** Gold Award is given to games that score at least 90%

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Our pick of all the latest
Nintendo News

Edited by
Steve Hogarty

Wii U™

A New Revolution

How Assassin's Creed could lead the charge on third-party support for Wii U

***Assassin's Creed 3* is coming to Wii U, Ubisoft confirmed at last month's Game Developers Conference in San Francisco. It marks** the stealth action series' proud debut on a Nintendo console, with the previous four (yes, four) instalments having sneaked right past the Wii. The game's release date of October 30 was also announced, though no specific date was given for the Wii U version.

Set in the rural countryside of 18th century New York during the American Revolution, *Assassin's Creed 3*'s story will span 30 years of the American history, encompassing the celebrities of the day (Ubisoft has already confirmed George Washington, who in fame terms was a bit like the Lady Gaga of his time) as well as actual historical events, battles and a load of funny-shaped hats.

You'll play as a new character: the snappily named Ratohnhaketon. Son of a Native American and an Englishman, he finds himself in the centre of an ancient war between the shadowy Templars and the stabby Assassins. A new graphics engine will power an open world in the grip of a harsh winter and populated by soldiers, wildlife and townsfolk who would probably be better off indoors, where there are fewer free-running, tomahawk-wielding assassins.

"THIS IS A DECLARATION OF STRONG AND EARLY THIRD-PARTY SUPPORT"

Party Hard

Of course, this announcement sets a rather exciting precedent for Nintendo fans. Not only will the Wii U be hosting what Ubisoft is already saying could be its biggest ever project (the game is being developed by Ubisoft Montreal in collaboration with no fewer than six other Ubisoft studios), but *Assassin's Creed 3*'s appearance on Wii U is also a declaration of strong and early third-party support for Nintendo's next console. Coupled with Nintendo's first-party titles, there's now a clear and increasing potential for an earth-shattering lineup of launch games.

Nintendo boss Satoru Iwata promised as much last year when he spoke of plans to court more outside developers. "What we are aiming for with the Nintendo 3DS and the Wii U are platforms that have much more software and a wider variety of software than the Nintendo DS or Wii," claimed Iwata at Nintendo's annual general meeting of shareholders in 2011 (bit.ly/qB2aIG). "Therefore, we are thinking of creating an environment in which software from other companies will become hits. Please understand that Nintendo is prepared to invest in order to make this a reality." Clearly *Assassin's Creed 3* on Wii U could be a return on that investment, and a bold illustration of that third-party led reality coming to pass. ✚

Go to the
ONM WEBSITE
For more exclusive Nintendo news!

"THE STORY ENCOMPASSES 30 YEARS OF HISTORY, WITH REAL EVENTS, BATTLES AND FUNNY HATS"

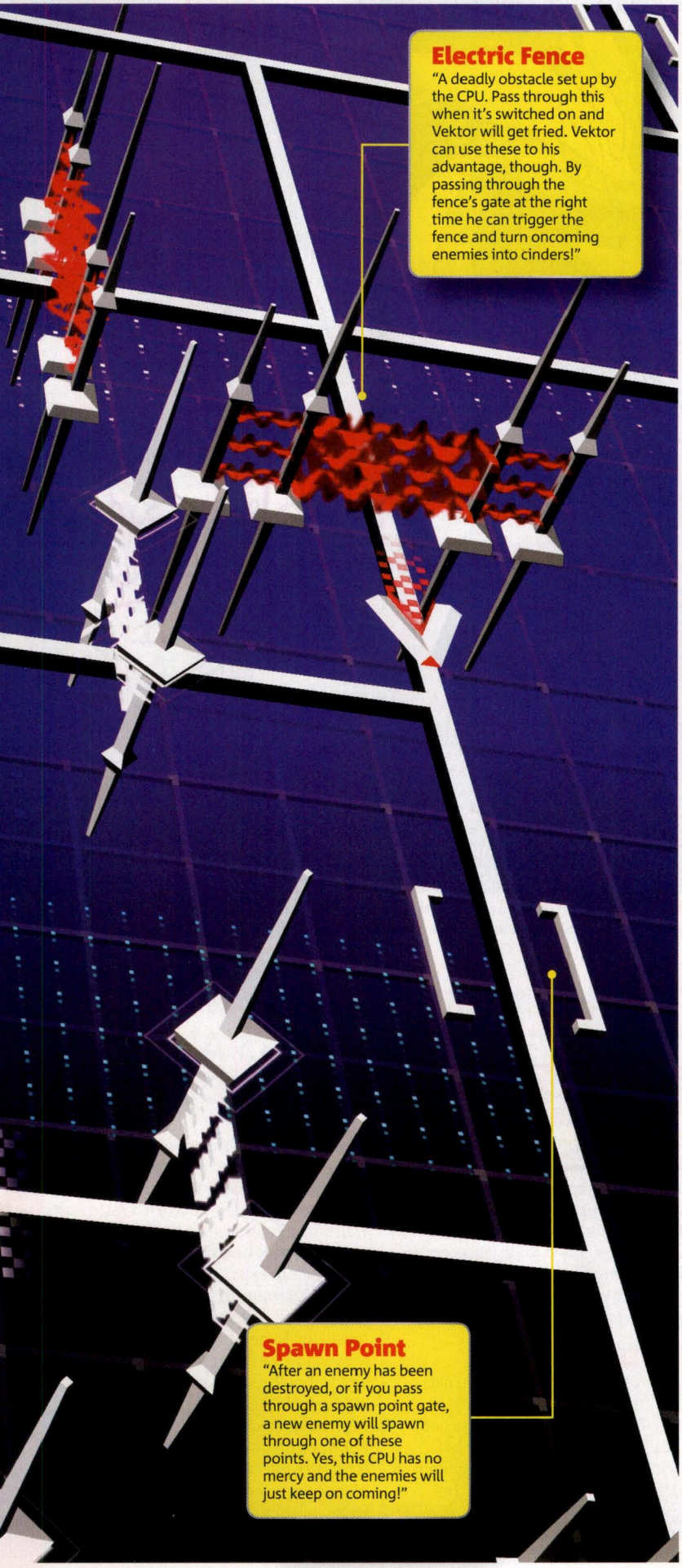
The first Assassin's Creed game was set during the Crusades and the second around Renaissance Italy. The 18th century setting of the third game is the most recent period of history yet visited, meaning our hero will have to contend with more advanced weaponry, such as rifles and pistols. Get your stealth boots on.

Gate
"These are triggers for enemies and objects. Passing through a gate might trigger a Hunter or Interceptor, or switch an electric fence on or off, so Vektor needs to have his wits about him."
Hunter
"Of medium intelligence, Hunters will search the whole level to track Vektor down. Sometimes they might pick the wrong direction when they are chasing Vektor, but they'll get him in the end if he hangs around too much."
"THIS CPU HAS NO MERCY AND THE ENEMIES WILL JUST KEEP ON COMING!"
Interceptor
"Fast and intelligent, they will head straight for Vektor as soon as they are spawned. Multiple Interceptors might swarm on Vektor in some levels, so he needs to move fast. They have one notable weakness though: they can only cross a certain number of intersections before they self-destruct."

escapeVektor

The WiiWare action puzzler heads to 3DS

Last year's *escapeVektor* was an instant WiiWare hit, a sort of flashy amalgamation of *Tron* and *Pac-Man* set against a wonderful, pseudo-digital circuitscape and accompanied by some catchy, bleepy, bloopy chiptunes. The aim was to travel along every inch of a virtual grid, avoiding enemy AI as they attempted to corner and outwit you. Fill in one square of the grid and it vaporises any enemies left on that particular square. Tactical arcade fun! Developer Nnooo recently announced plans to bring the action puzzler to Nintendo 3DS later this year, so we chased the studio's co-founder, Bruce Thompson, along a thin neon line until he relented and told us everything we needed to know about *escapeVektor 3DS*. +


Electric Fence
"A deadly obstacle set up by the CPU. Pass through this when it's switched on and Vektor will get fried. Vektor can use these to his advantage, though. By passing through the fence's gate at the right time he can trigger the fence and turn oncoming enemies into cinders!"
Spawn Point
"After an enemy has been destroyed, or if you pass through a spawn point gate, a new enemy will spawn through one of these points. Yes, this CPU has no mercy and the enemies will just keep on coming!"

Month in Numbers

A scientific breakdown of team **ONM**'s monthly activity

What we've been talking about...

52 mins That new Pokémon's a bit like the two kinds of puppy from the end of *Lady And The Tramp*.

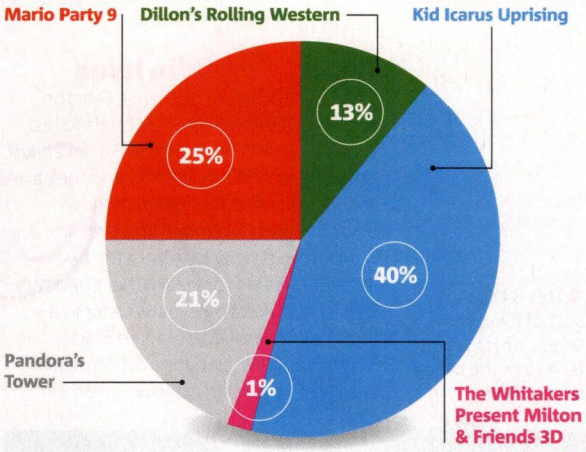
45 mins Both Tom and Steve have fallen in love with Dillon, armadillo of *Rolling Western* fame.

28 mins The actor from the *Back To The Future* game nails that Michael J. Fox squeak.

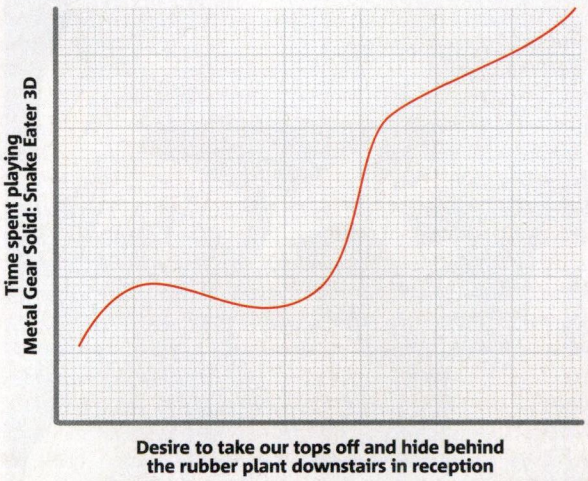
18 mins *Mario Tennis Open* really lets us flex our withered, underused tennis punning muscles.

33 mins *Kid Icarus Uprising*'s swords – how big is too big?

What we've been playing...



Nintendo Graph of the Month...


Time spent playing Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D
Desire to take our tops off and hide behind the rubber plant downstairs in reception

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Our pick of all the latest **Nintendo News**

Soap Box

"Pokémon is right back on forme," puns a delirious *Steve Hogarty*

We Say

Steve Hogarty
Deputy Editor

Last month, Game Freak director, Junichi Masuda, appeared live on insane Japanese TV show, Pokémon Smash, to reveal two new Pokémon games. It was, we're reliably informed, a dignified and ceremonious on-air announcement, the solemnity of which caused two men in Oshawott costumes to fall to their knees before embracing one another and weeping a century of tears.

Black And White Issue

The man told a rapt audience that the games will be two direct sequels to last year's best-selling *Pokémon Black Version* and *Pokémon White Version* and they are called, quite simply, *Pokémon Black Version 2* and *Pokémon White Version 2*.

Adorning their covers are the two freshly revealed formes of the legendary Pokémon Kyurem, revealed later in a tweet by Masuda to be called Black Kyurem and White Kyurem. Formes, in case you've misplaced your Pokémon glossary, are a bit like breeds of the same species of Pokémon, causing them to differ slightly in appearance and, in some cases, attributes.

If it helps, just think of these two Kyurems as black and white labradors, where the black labrador can electrocute cats and the white one can shoot flames from its eyes.

She's Electric

Now, if we may pop our detective hats on for just a moment, what's perhaps most interesting here is that these two opposing formes strongly resemble hybrids of legendary Pokémon Kyurem and the legendary cover stars of the original *Pokémon Black* and *Pokémon White*. Observe, if you will, Black Kyurem's Zekrom-style wings and White Kyurem's Reshiram-style tail. It doesn't take a forensics expert to work out that this particular trio of legendaries are all closely related, but we'll have to wait until the game's release this year to find out exactly how these two formes have come to exist.

Both *Pokémon Black Version 2* and *Pokémon White Version 2* are set for release on Nintendo DS this autumn, following a June release in Japan, which should temporarily silence the little voice in the back of our skulls that's been screaming for the first main-series Pokémon game on Nintendo 3DS. The little voice that screams louder and louder with every passing minute, until we're clutching our heads and rolling around on the floor in anticipation of a fully three-dimensional Bidoof. ✚

This new White Kyurem has swiped Reshiram's characteristics, the cheeky sod.

This is the new sort of Kyurem. Guess which one it is. A clue: the other one is White.

These two new Formes aren't strictly new Pokémon, rather they're just variations on an existing Pokémon. It's like the difference between a Wispa and a Wispa Gold.

"IF IT HELPS, JUST TRY TO THINK OF THESE TWO KYUREMS AS BLACK AND WHITE LABRADORS"

UK Pokémon Champs Crowned

Wanna be the very best? Well unless your name is here, better luck next year...

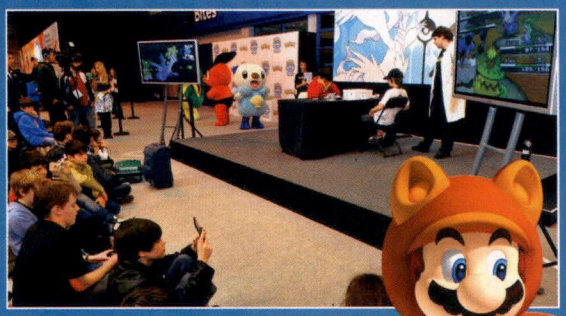
It takes three things to become a Pokémon master: a victory at the nationals in Birmingham, six Pokémon and courage or bravery, or something. So it was that last month at the UK's Pokémon Video Game Championships, Ahren Bundy, George Langford and Ben Kyriakou definitely demonstrated that they had what it takes. (Ben, incredibly, won using a team made up of only Gary Oak's original Pokémon).

They placed first in the Junior, Senior and Masters divisions respectively, beating hundreds of other trainers to qualify for the championship finals in Hawaii in August. Exciting!

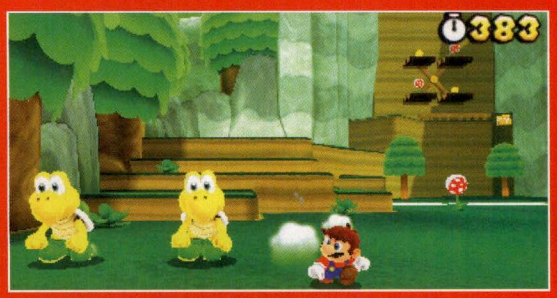
"BEN WON USING A TEAM MADE UP OF ONLY GARY OAK'S ORIGINAL POKÉMON"

We sent Nintendo TV's intrepid frontline correspondent, Gavin Murphy, all the way up to the haunted badlands of Birmingham to cover the festivities, the results of which can be seen on the most recent episode of the show. It's available now on your Nintendo 3DS. Fancy having a go? Start training now, the VGCs are returning next year! ✚

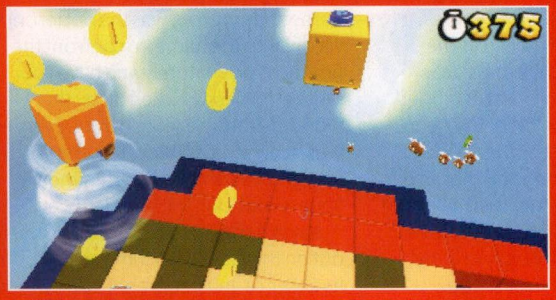
Nintendo TV's man in Birmingham scores yet another red-hot interview.



Two titans of the modern game exchange blows at the championship.



Mario's skater bros hoot the successful landing of yet another sick air. Tony Hawk: you are, like, yesterday.



Nintendo designers need to come up a constant stream of novel ideas, each one weirder and funnier than the last.

The Ideas Man

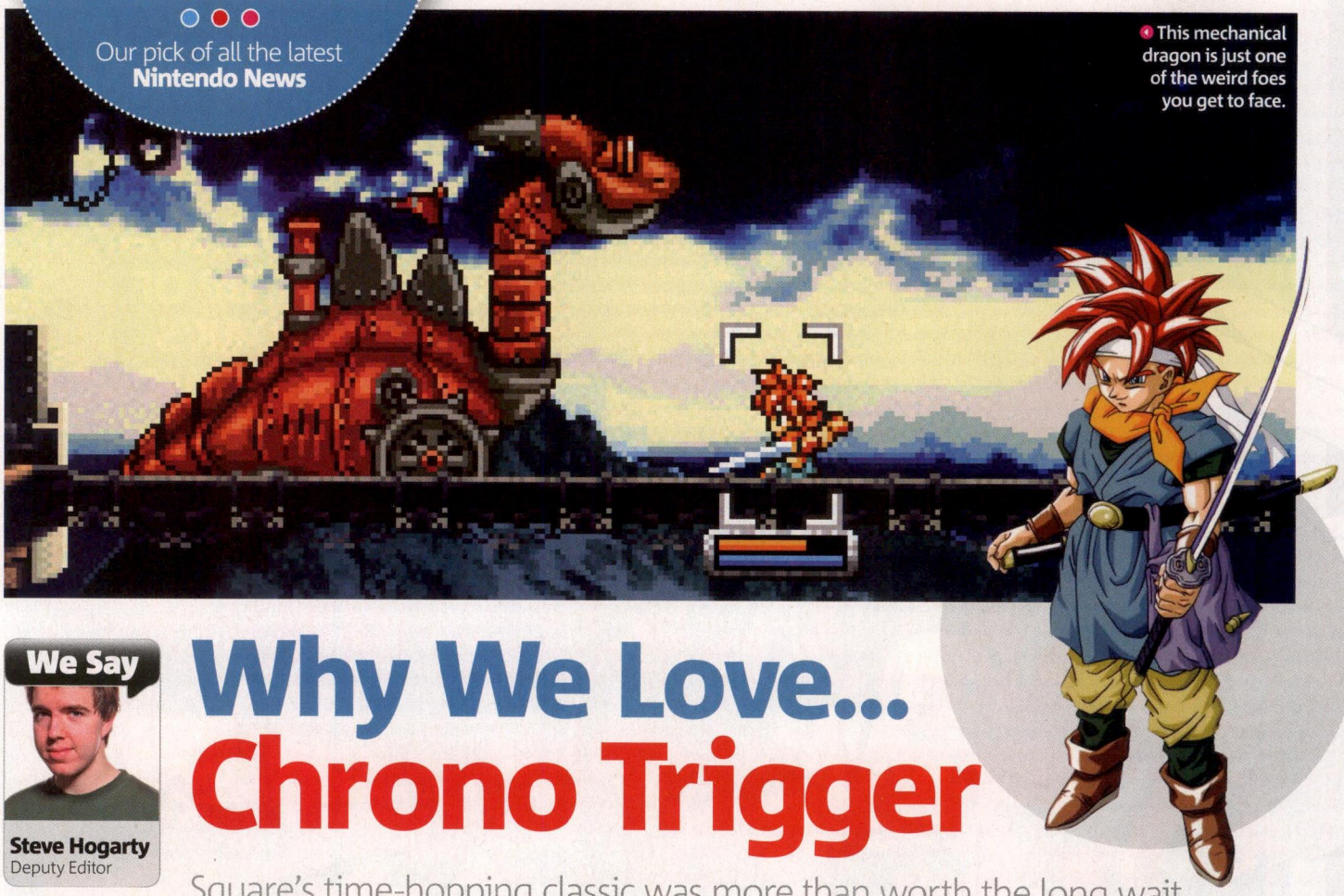
Rejected Super Mario 3D Land ideas revealed

Koichi Hayashida, director of *Super Mario 3D Land*, took to the stage at last month's Game Developers Conference in San Francisco to discuss some of the weirder ideas thrown around during the game's development. Among them was a sort of *Pro Skater Mario*, in which Mario would scoot about on top of a green Koopa shell, pulling gnarly flips and bodacious grinds in a half-pipe.

Another had players slamming the console shut to crush bugs on the touchscreen. Even more interesting was a mooted feature that would enable you to replace Peach's face with your own, presumably enabling players to chase Mario around levels demanding kisses. "We must always consider ideas outside the normal range from what people expect from a Mario game," Hayashida said in his lecture to fellow developers.

"We must make others laugh with strange new ideas. We have to keep a feeling of joy in the development process." Too right, we say. Despite pressure to deliver the first Mario platformer on Nintendo 3DS, the studio clearly had a bit of a laugh during development. "Enjoying making something leads to making something enjoyable," Hayashida added. ✚

Tell us about the classic Nintendo games you love by visiting **officialnintendomagazine.co.uk**



This mechanical dragon is just one of the weird foes you get to face.

We Say

Steve Hogarty
Deputy Editor

Why We Love... Chrono Trigger

Square's time-hopping classic was more than worth the long wait

Before it was eventually re-released in Europe in 2009, a full 14 years after it first launched in America, *Chrono Trigger* was a mythical, foreign thing to my 10-year-old self. Like some sort of videogame Beast of Bodmin, I'd heard descriptions and second-hand accounts from older children, the bigger boys with haircuts and BMXes and full-sized trampolines in their back gardens.

Some of them claimed to have played the thing, or said they knew somebody who owned it, or were given it by their uncle who worked for Nintendo. More often than not, they'd simply imported it, which still felt weirdly clandestine, like something out of a spy film: all brown trenchcoats and muttering about how cold it was in Moscow. If I'd tried to slot *Chrono Trigger* into my European SNES, I'd have expected a SWAT team to smash through my bedroom window.

I'd also heard that your TV could explode if you played the wrong games through it. I genuinely believed that. But still, these bigger boys were defiantly playing a videogame that wasn't out over here yet, and I had half a mind to dob them all in to the police.

There are loads of mini-games, side-quests and distractions from the main plot. *Chrono Trigger* is still worth playing.

Trigger Happy

So began years of America-envy, fuelled by this absence of *Chrono Trigger*, as well as my innate fear of imported games. It was – and still is – often hailed as the greatest RPG ever made, a massive, time-hopping adventure that exploded the standard, linear format of the genre and established Square as a leader in character-led storytelling and plot. Even after having waited longer than a decade for its eventual European re-release on the DS, it stood out as a boldly original adventure with unmatched scope.

Its central conceit, the ability to travel between eras at will, enabled you to explore different versions of the same world and revel in differences great and small. There was stark, foreboding contrast between the serenity of the present and the seemingly inevitable catastrophic future that was about to befall it. As you played and explored, your actions began to have demonstrable consequences. Small events in the prehistoric era would have dramatic repercussions in future eras.

With seven different eras to visit, the game rapidly became deep, branching and complex, chunks of the game could be missed, depending on how you played. This diverging plot culminated in 12 unique endings (with one additional ending added to the DS version making the role-playing baker's dozen), some of which were remarkably dark and anything but victorious.

Fascinating, too, was the option, not too far into the game, to confront the final boss prematurely and have your faces effortlessly kicked off by the world-devouring monstrosity. Every era was richly atmospheric, too, thanks to a soundtrack composed by legendary Square musician, Nobuo Uematsu.

It was a shame so many people missed out on this classic first time around, but its absence and geographical aloofness gave *Chrono Trigger* a grand air of mysticism. At least, that's how it seemed to a child at the time. Perhaps Americans

Like any good RPG, *Chrono Trigger* begins with our hero gadding about town and interfering with teleportation pods.

The Arena of the Ages, a sort of Pokémon-lite, was added in the DS version.

The game's cast remains one of the best in RPGs.

felt the same way about *Xenoblade Chronicles* when, for a short while, a question mark lingered over when they would get their hands on a copy.

Of course, thanks to rampant globalisation, regional exclusives are rarer than they once were, and in the minds of most they're now utterly maligned, but I doubt I'd have savoured *Chrono Trigger* so much had I not been made to wait more than half my life to play it. Its absence from my childhood formed a sort of dam of expectation that, when it finally burst, didn't fail to utterly drown me in RPG greatness. ✚

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Now & Then

Putting retro favourites under the cruel glare of the present

Chrono Trigger

SNES, 1995

One of the prettiest games made for the SNES, *Chrono Trigger*'s sprites still ooze the best sort of retro charm. The time travel effects made great use of screen-smearing Mode 7 effects, with the game's psychedelic, tie-dye portals threatening to send your retinas into a state of permanent dazzlement.

Xenoblade Chronicles

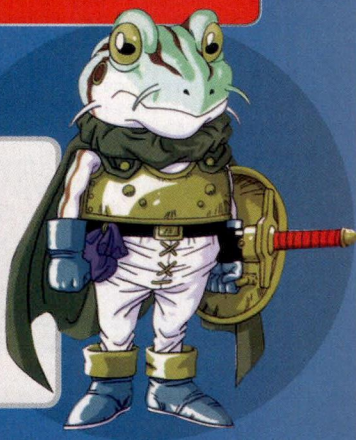
Wii, 2011

Xenoblade Chronicles' setting atop the backs of two ancient warring titans might have seemed a bit limiting at first, but it's a visually ambitious game and, as *Chrono Trigger* did for the SNES, it squeezes every last ounce of graphical fidelity out of the Wii to bring its rich, lush world to life.

You Say

"It has an effective battle system, a great soundtrack, multiple endings, lovable characters, a lovely art style and memorable moments. And it's only 900 points on the Virtual Vonsole."

John Light via Facebook



"The team makes it great. Chrono's strong, Marle won't take no for an answer and Robo's never gonna give you up."

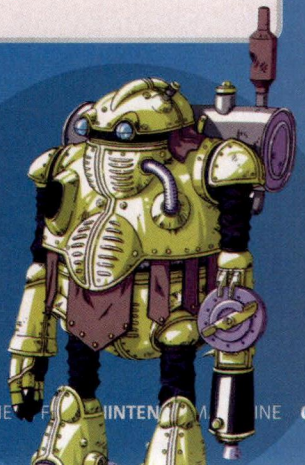
Matthew John Jonas via Facebook

"Great characters, lovely soundtrack and a fun battle system. If only it had hit the SNES here, it would surely have been one of the defining games of my youth. Coming to it for the first time on VC and DS, it's a great RPG that has aged very well indeed."

Phil Smart via Facebook

"Chrono's loyal amphibian friend proves that Slippy isn't a fair representation of Frogmen in gaming."

Conall MacCanna via Facebook



Select

Our pick of all the latest **Nintendo News**

The Month Ahead

A guide to the best releases and biggest events of the coming weeks

In The Groove

The tap-tastic *Rhythm Thief & The Emperor's Treasure* arrives on Nintendo 3DS today, offering up tuneful Parisian adventure as art thief Raphael investigates his father's disappearance. He does this, you'll be happy to hear, by solving puzzles and dancing a lot.

- Date **6 April**

Easter Is Easter

Fans of chocolate and eggs rejoice! Actually, fans of eggs should despair, as Easter barely features any genuine eggs. And if you go around calling yourself a Fan of Eggs, then flagrant and repeated misrepresentation of eggs is probably the sort of thing that winds you up. If you're not a fan of hunting for eggs, we recommend firing up *Super Mario Galaxy* to hunt some Star Bunnies instead. It's in keeping with the spirit of the holiday, and your dentist will probably thank you for it.

- Date **8 April**

Pandora's Rocks

The last of the trio of blockbuster Japanese RPGs to arrive on Wii in recent months (the others being *The Last Story* and *Xenoblade Chronicles*), *Pandora's Tower* is out today. The game features 13 towers, 13 bosses and launches on (guess what) Friday the 13th, but if you're a fan of whips and devouring hearts, today is anything but unlucky.

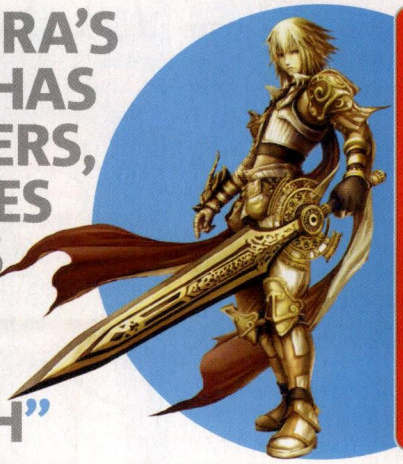
- Date **13 April**

When It Bahrains...

Last year's Bahrain GP was cancelled as the country was in a state of turmoil after the population became a tad miffed with their government, but 2012 sees the return of everybody putting their fingers in their ears and having a Formula 1 race there, anyway.

- Date **22 April**

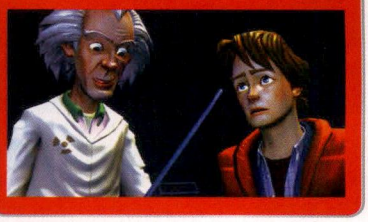
"PANDORA'S TOWER HAS 13 TOWERS, 13 BOSSES AND IT'S OUT ON FRIDAY THE 13TH"



Future Perfect

Back To The Future arrives on Wii today. Future happens to be the name of this magazine's publisher, so sometimes after eating lunch one of the **ONM** team might quip, "Shall we go back to the Future?" and we'll laugh for hours and hours. Oh, we like to joke.

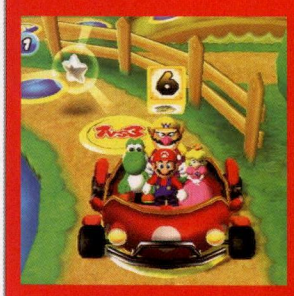
- Date **27 April**



Worrall Woo Woo

Today marks the birthdays of both revered director, John Woo, as well as cautioned cheese-thief and celebrity chef, Anthony Worrall Thompson. Why not celebrate by inviting some friends over for a game of *Mario Party 9* on Wii, eating some pilfered fromage and watching *Face/Off*? And if action movies are your thing, why not dive back into *Kid Icarus Uprising*'s multiplayer mode for some of the most action-crammed communal gameplay on Nintendo 3DS? By now you should have had time to unlock some seriously impressive weapons.

- Date **1 May**



New ONM

What's that sound? A sort of distant rumbling, getting louder... could it be? Yes! It's a new issue of **ONM** and it's heading this way. Subscribers: grease your letterbox hinges in anticipation of its arrival. The rest of you, it's off to the shops you go, because new **ONM** hits the shelves today! But wait, that's not the only thing to do on this beautiful, sunny (we're guessing) Thursday afternoon. Fire up the Nintendo 3DS eShop to check out the latest downloads and Virtual Console releases. You'll find the selection's expanded to include Game Gear titles. We'll still be playing *Sonic The Hedgehog: Triple Trouble*, probably.

- Date **3 May**

Nintendo®

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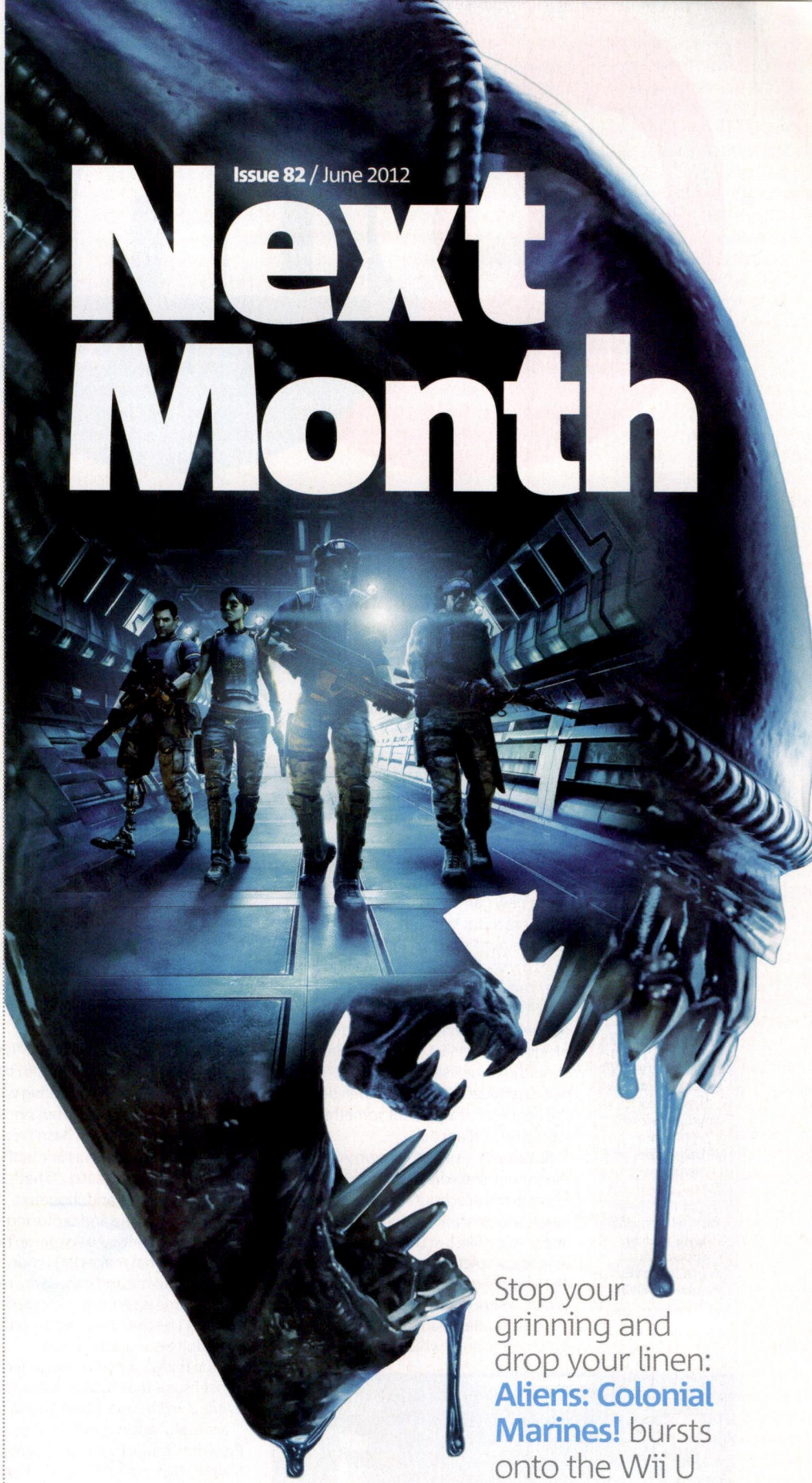
Issue 82 / June 2012

Next Month



Stop your grinning and drop your linen: **Aliens: Colonial Marines!** bursts onto the Wii U

Issue 82 on sale
Thursday 3 May

We reserve the right to change this content. So there.

Connect

Your Official Nintendo community views

Discuss

The hottest topic on our forums this month

Off Topic

Crut_93 told his fellow forumites of his odd experience. "On three occasions in less than a month I've heard my mum calling my name, when she definitely hasn't. I'm pretty freaked out. Am I crazy? Has anything like this happened to anyone before?" "You are possessed," explained OrangeRakoon, helpfully. "Beat out the demons with a rusty spoon." And another problem is solved. Sweet!

The announcement in March that *Pokémon Black* & *White 2* were on their way to the Nintendo DS was met with virtual whooping and hollering on the **ONM** forums. Forumites were delighted that a new game was on its way so soon. "I'm amazed at how quickly this is going to come out," said **Da_Epic_Fail**. "There goes my social life: I'm still playing *Black* like crazy. I can't wait for this."

With new Pokémon games come new requests from fans and our lot quickly produced a wishlist. "I think the layout should change," said **Dana_ava**. "I don't mind getting eight badges then beating the Pokémon league, but something new would be brilliant."

Shadow.x also had his own views on the sequel, sneakily slipping in a little boast in the process. "I hope new and larger towns are added and maybe a less linear story, like last time. I just want to be able to complete the game in a minimum of 15 hours, unlike the original *Black* and *White*, where it was done in nine hours."

Some readers had their concerns, the most common of which was that the games were coming to the DS, instead of the 3DS. "By the time they're released the 3DS will have been out for a year and a half," wailed **laytonluke911**. But **emperor ing** was there to provide the voice of reason. "I'm sure the 3DS games will come," he soothed. "Bear in mind that *Black* and *White* were only released last year, and there are usually a few years between each generation of the main series. Give it a couple of years and generation six will be on 3DS."

TomMc92, meanwhile, was indifferent to the whole thing. "I really enjoyed Pokémon, but now I'm starting to go off it," he mused, looking wistfully at the moon. "I've been a fan since the start of the series, but it hasn't really changed at all." This was immediately shot down by **rukaio101**. "That's because it doesn't need to and shouldn't," he raged. "The battle and capturing system and the constant new Pokémon being added are what makes Pokémon enjoyable to me and if these are removed or the game is seriously changed it wouldn't be the same and probably wouldn't be as good." Boom.

One thing's for sure, the general consensus is that *Pokémon Black 2* and *White 2* will be a very good thing indeed. "I am looking forward to buying a Pokémon game for once," beamed **lrwr14**. "Normally I'm not bothered, but we are finally getting a sequel instead of a two-in-one game." **PrincessGingy** agreed, enthusing: "I am so excited. Since they're changing things up a bit and doing sequels, instead of the usual remake, I hope they take the chance to venture away from the usual, linear storylines. But, then again, I never get bored of Pokémon and hope they don't change things too much." Agreed. ✚

▲ *Pokémon Black* and *White* were a huge step up for the series. Will the sequels manage the same feat? We're pretty hopeful.

Get in touch!

Send us your views on the latest Nintendo news and games, and we might print them! Here are the different ways to contact us

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Email us at onm@futurenet.com with the subject line 'letters'

Text us on 87474 and start your message with the word 'ONMTEXT'

Facebook us at facebook.com/officialnintendomagazine

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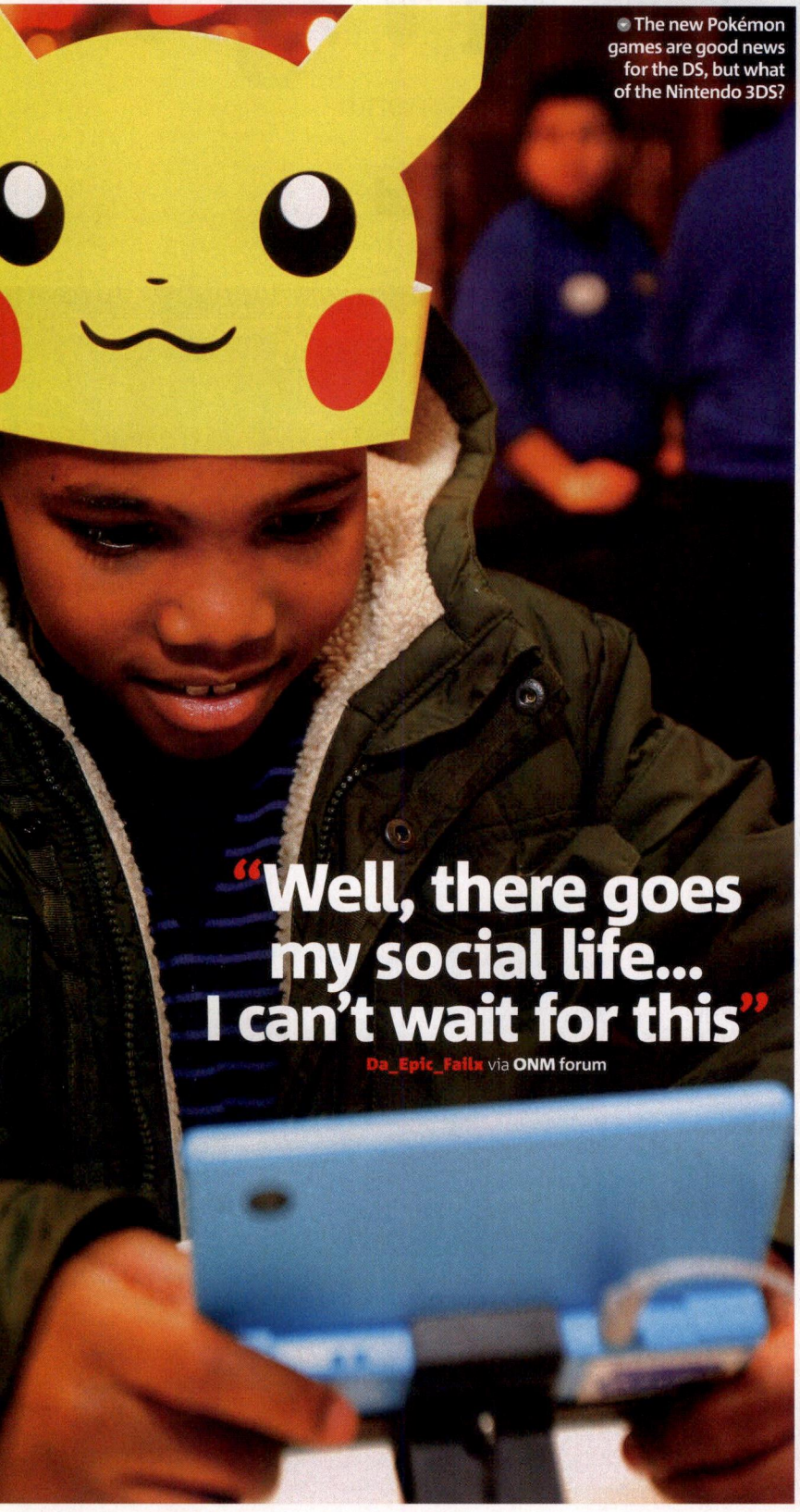


The new Pokémon games are good news for the DS, but what of the Nintendo 3DS?

"Well, there goes my social life... I can't wait for this"

Da_Epic_Failx via **ONM** forum

Your Forum Comments

Random dispatches from the **ONM** community

Had the N64 launched today it would have bombed. I'm amazed it did so well: There were only three games at launch, and those that followed were ridiculously expensive.
DJ

I hate it in games like Sonic when you try to get a good speed run, mess up, select Restart and it starts loading! Shouldn't they just reset you to back to the start?
CyberGW

Gaaaah, confusion in Pokémon games! "Foe is confused, foe uses attack and kills you anyway." "You are confused, you kill yourself in the confusion."
Lego master

I am unsure what I think of *Shadow The Hedgehog*. There is a part of me that loves that kind of "Oooh, I'm so angsty!" character, but I can't quite say I like him.
Tanrei

I've no problem with remakes. Games aren't meant to be enjoyed forever; it's why new games are made to be enjoyed. Some are welcome, such as *Metroid Zero Mission*.
liberal

Get your comment in the magazine

We print the best letters, emails, forum posts and texts in Connect every month!

Connect

Your Official Nintendo community views

Network

New ways to connect using 3DS, Wii and DS this month

Quick Tips

Transfer DSiWare to your 3DS

Step 1
Make sure both your DSi (or XL) and your 3DS have the latest System Update installed.

Step 2
Now go to the DSi Shop on your DSi and download the free System Transfer tool.

Step 3
Choose the System Transfer option on both your DSi and your 3DS's Settings menu.

Step 4
Now just follow the on-screen instructions. Note: both systems will need to be able to connect online.

1 Fighting Round The World

Super Street Fighter II is the first online Virtual Console game

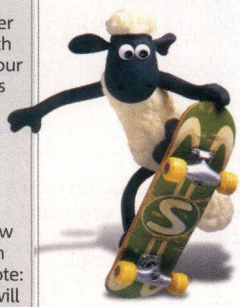
Now you can punch Ryu in the mouth online. Yes.

It must be great to be Doctor Who, getting to travel to whatever time zone you like and mess around with things. Until recently we'd have said that if we were Doctor Who, we'd like to go back in time to the 16-bit days of the Mega Drive and SNES and use the knowledge we have now to put online multiplayer in those games. Now it turns out we don't need to learn how to build a Tardis, because Nintendo and Capcom have already sorted it out. This month sees the release of the Mega Drive version of *Super Street Fighter II* on the Virtual Console. "No big deal," you may think, "the SNES version has been on it for years." True, but this Mega Drive version is the first Virtual Console game to have a newly added online multiplayer mode. It's like the future and past combined.

Online multiplayer in a Mega Drive game? Next you'll be telling us you can play 3D games on a handheld without glasses. Oh.

2 We're Feeling A Bit Sheepish

Shaun The Sheep episodes are finally on Nintendo Video



One Man And His Dog reaches out to The Young People.

For months now, we've been waiting for the *Shaun The Sheep* mini-series to appear on Nintendo Video. If you're also still waiting, then you should probably have stopped by now, since the first of 15 weekly clips arrived on the service on 7 March. By our calculations, that means there'll be a new clip appearing on Nintendo Video every week until 13 June, so don't fret too much if you missed the first couple, because there's plenty more still to come. Since they were such a big deal, we wouldn't be surprised if Nintendo and Aardman played them again sometime in the future. Keep those fingers crossed.

Presumably the Nintendo 3DS pictured comes with some kind of custom Cloven Hoof Pad modification for ovine games.

New Every Day

Fire For Free

Although *Fire Emblem: Awakening* will have regular paid DLC, Nintendo has said the first batch will be free. Hooray!

Keep Us Updated

If you're a 3DS Ambassador, head to the eShop and update your NES games for real-time save functionality.

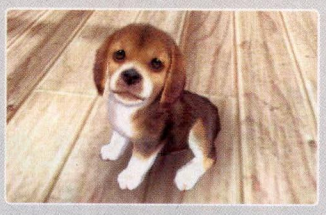
3 Try These On For Size

New demos have been added to the 3DS eShop. Here's what's on offer

It's all snakes, puppies and crushing this month.

Crush3D

Sega's platform puzzler gave us a massive headache when we tried to solve some of its dimension-bending puzzles. Try it to see if you can fare any better than we did.



Nintendogs + Cats

Aww, look at the cuddly animals. What's that? You're not sure whether such adorable delights are worth your dosh? Get the demo and perform a rigorous evaluation.

Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D

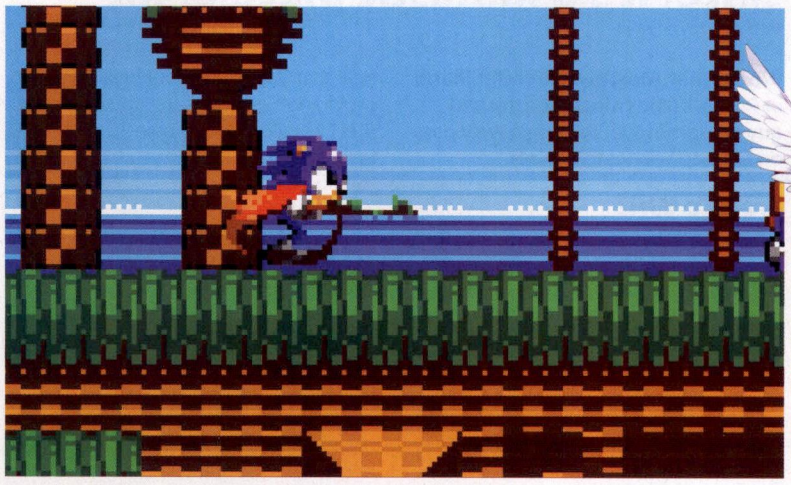
Play a tiny snippet from Hideo Kojima's excellent 3D remake of the PS2 stealth classic and see why we reckon it's a must-buy.

4 It's Reet Good Gear, Like

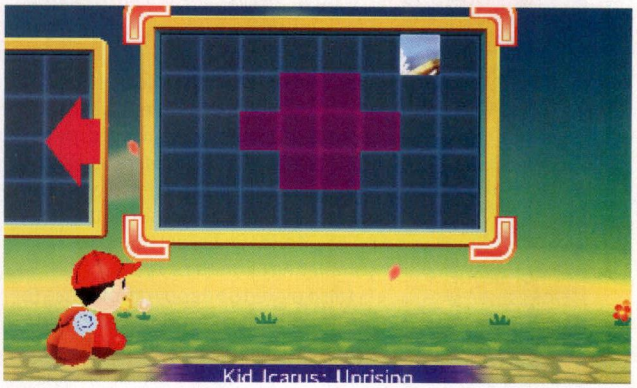
Game Gear classics have come to the 3DS Virtual Console

While Sega's colour handheld never had the game library to rival that of the Game Boy, there were still some surprisingly great titles on the system and the first batch to arrive – *Sonic's Triple Trouble*, *Shinobi* and *Dragon Crystal* – are great examples of this. As ever, we'll review all the latest Virtual Console games right here in the mag and at officialnintendomagazine.co.uk so you'll know which ones are worth buying. Sadly, some should have stayed in the past along with Tab Clear, Marathon bars and those pointless, strap-type things that used to wrap around your arm when you slapped it with them.

Re-live some of Sega's past glories with Game Gear classics on 3DS Virtual Console.



We're sure these graphics looked a whole lot more mind-blowing in our youth.



5 That Kid Really Puzzles Me

Puzzle Swap gets a new Kid Icarus: Uprising puzzle

Spare a thought for our very own Chris Scullion. After months of StreetPassing and Play Coin spending, he finally managed to complete all 14 puzzles in StreetPass Puzzle Swap. A gargantuan achievement by any reckoning, we are sure you'll agree. In a cruel twist of fate and timing, however, Nintendo added a new puzzle via SpotPass just one day later: a 40-piece one promoting *Kid Icarus: Uprising*. There was much wailing and gnashing of teeth: you've never seen a man so utterly distressed. Anyway, the puzzle's now available for free, for all. If you don't have it yet, just make sure your Nintendo 3DS is connected to SpotPass. It'll just download itself to your system automatically and the next time you start up Puzzle Swap you'll get the puzzle and one random piece.

A new Kid Icarus puzzle is available to download now.

Tennis, Everyone?

It's been confirmed that *Mario Tennis Open* will feature full online multiplayer and character customisation.

Don't Be Cross

Picross E will be coming to the eShop later this year. Smiles have been fixed to all our faces for weeks.

Inbox

The best of your letters and emails this month

Hot Topics

Pokémon
Black & White 2 have been announced and we've heard of little else from you, frankly.

Letter Box
Nintendo's free messaging app for 3DS seems to have been building itself a real following.

Wii U
With only a few months until E3, we're all eagerly awaiting the re-announcement of the Wii U.

Star Letter

Back in September I was diagnosed with glandular fever, and, being in my 20s, was warned that recovery would take a fair few months. During one of many days in bed, I decided to dust off the old N64 to liven up my dull life. It was like being 12 again: I played many of my old favourites, including *GoldenEye*, *Worms Armageddon* and *Blast Corps*. I was again able to enjoy the immense commentary on *ISS 64* and I finally got round to completing *Ocarina Of Time*.

I also picked up a copy of your mag for the first time in about eight years, and instantly became interested in the Nintendo 3DS. I picked one up cheap online and haven't put it down since: it's a fantastic piece of kit. Thank you for the recommendations and for helping me to rediscover the Nintendo magic.

Bob Haltz, via email

Proof that glandular fever can indeed be a good thing. We're glad you've rediscovered your love for Nintendo, Bob. Have some games on us so you can catch up on what you've been missing, though sadly none will match the bizarrely-translated majesty of *ISS 64*'s commentary.

Bowser's Pint-Sized Glory

My five-year-old sister, Jenna, is probably the world's biggest Bowser fan. Every night she writes letters to him, hoping he'll someday write back. She always uses the Nintendo Letter Box feature of my Nintendo 3DS to write him letters, too. She has a Bowser plush toy and pictures of him all over her wall. She knows quite a bit about him and is always reading information about him on the internet. Please print this letter, as it would mean so much to her if you did.

Grace Tucker, via email

Classics such as *Banjo-Kazooie* still offer oodles of fun to N64 owners.

"I picked up a Nintendo 3DS cheap online and haven't put it down since: it's a fantastic piece of kit"

Bob Haltz, via email

We like that. Most people prefer Mario or Peach, but it's nice to see the bad guy get some love. Tell Jenna we'll pass on her best wishes to Bowser.

Free To Wii?

Since the Wii U is getting a version of the PC free-to-play title, *Ghost Recon: Online*, then perhaps other F2P tiles such as *Blacklight: Retribution* and *MechWarrior: Online* could be released for the Wii U as well. Free-to-play games are picking up in popularity and it is difficult for the current consoles to support them, but if the Wii U can attract more popular F2P games, it may gain a considerable advantage over its competitors. I already hear that Microsoft is looking into providing F2P games as well, so I expect that F2P will not be remain PC exclusive for very much longer.

Hyawatta, via email

It'll be interesting to see. If the Wii U is as easy to develop for as we've heard, we don't see why not.

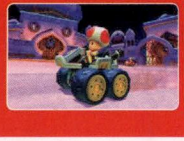
Skyward Bored

As you know, *Skyward Sword* came out in November. I bought it on the first day, expecting a faultless game with breathtaking cutscenes after your review declared it "the greatest Zelda game by far". Instead, I spent six hours of

ONM Awards

Best Thread
The "Freakyforms QR Sharing" thread in our forum has a bunch of fantastic new creations in there.

Best Text
"I've completed *Super Mario 3D Land* and *Mario Kart 7*, two awesome games. Well done Nintendo." Anonymous



Look upon my works, ye mighty Nintendo collectors and despair.

My Nintendo Collection

Well folks, looks like we have ourselves a winner

Longview01, via the **ONM** Forum

Sometimes you just look at a photo for a while and just don't know what to say. Usually such photos aren't fit for publication, but thankfully, these ones from Longview01 are totally safe for mainstream consumption. This ridiculously large collection spans the complete history of Nintendo, though it's his NES stuff that's the most impressive, we think. With an absolutely whopping 175 NES games (and two official cleaning kits for it, which is undoubtedly handy for keeping things running as smoothly as humanly possible), a bunch of joypads and joysticks and even the memorably rubbish U-Force hands-free controller for a dash of added comedy value, we'd be very surprised if anyone else out there could come up with a retro Nintendo collection able to beat it any time soon. The gauntlet has been thrown down, people.

Surely the best NES collection we've ever seen.

Will *Ghost Recon: Online* on Wii U help usher in a new era of free-to-play gaming?

frustrating gaming just to get to the first temple. Plus, I found the storyline really difficult to follow.

After all the commotion about the greatness of it, I was deeply disappointed. I mean, who wants to spend their time looking for cushions with an enchanted sword? And what is up with Ghirahim? How can he catch a sword through his fingers and possess a flying whale? What I'm saying is it's not what I expected and I'm going to go back to playing *Ocarina Of Time* and *Majora's Mask* on my N64, with Epona, instead of a giant, useless bird.

Luke Jamieson, via email

We can safely say that letters like Luke's are very much in the minority when it comes to *Skyward Sword*. Does anyone else have controversial options on much-loved games?

Hoof Hearted

Has anyone else noticed that on the cover of *Ocarina Of Time 3D,* Epona has cloven hooves? Check it out for yourself, if you don't believe me.

Now, it could just be a normal marking or a trick of the light, but those big black stripes down the middle of her back hooves make her look a bit like a cow. Horses don't have cloven hooves! I'm pretty sure that in the game her hooves are just nice brown pixelly rectangles, so it's up to whatever individual drew the box art to explain this one. Tut tut, individual. Tut tut.

Louise Hanna, Edinburgh

Well spotted, those do indeed look like cloven hooves. Incidentally, the devil is also said to have cloven hooves, so does this mean Link has been riding a hellbeast all along? Probably not.

Happy 15th, N64!

I'm 19 years old, but I had just turned five when my brothers and I received our first video game console, the Nintendo 64. I can remember the celebrations when after three days of passing the controller around, my mum was finally able to get the first star on *Mario 64*.

We have my reaction on video of when I got *Banjo-Kazooie* as a Christmas present and couldn't stop screaming in excitement for about five minutes. It doesn't seem that long ago that we shared our awe when exploring Hyrule for the first time and our sheer terror when going into a boss room for the first time. We still laugh about the staircase in Mario 64 that required 70 stars to end and the time we spent several hours between us running up it to try to get to the top. Letters like this usually tend to end with the writer getting out their old Nintendo 64 from the attic and setting it up again, but it's already sitting next to my Nintendo Wii next to the TV and has always been there.

I still believe that, for its time the Nintendo 64 produced the best games of any console and it's evident from the ones re-released on the 3DS that they have stood the test of time.

Nathan McLewee, West Sussex

Excuse us, we've got something in our eye... ah, there it is. That's better, just a bit of dirt: it does tend to make one's eyes water slightly when grit gets stuck in there. Anyway, yes, that's a very good point you have there, Nathan, and well made. We have similarly fond memories of N64 and what it meant to us when we where young. Sniff.

Your Game Pitch

Pokémon Lime

jellyjal via the **ONM** forum

"In *Pokémon Lime* (along with spin-offs, *Lemon* and eventually *Orange*), a mad professor is cloning a Pokémon, but he knocks a lime bottle into the potion making a green mutation that must be stopped"

We've got no idea where this came from, but we're curious about fighting a Limeade Snorlax. Bring it on.

A zoologist would want a closer look at the cloven hooves on that horse there.

Best Tweet

@DeadlyNobba: "The *DOA* demo has done its job. I'm going to get my hands on the game as soon as possible!"

Best Facebooker

Kieran Hendry: "Can't help but feel sad when my cute starter Pokémon evolves. Goodbye Mudkip, hello Marshstomp."

Your Gallery

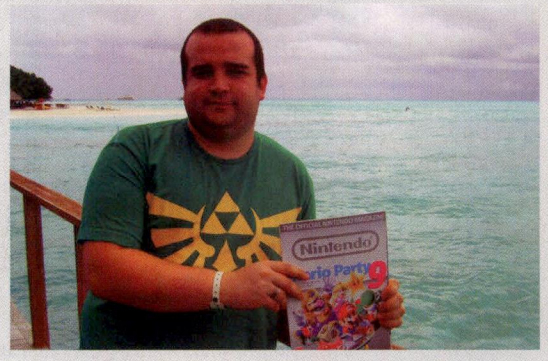
A selection of your latest and greatest Nintendo creations

TOON LINK
Ellie Scull

NINTENDO COLLAGE
George Hume

ONM On Tour

Where: Meeru Island, Maldives
Who: Leighton Sneade



Email your 'On Tour' photos to onm@futurenet.com now!

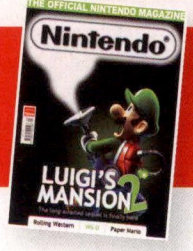
POKÉMON BLACK
DreamlandDreamer

KID ICARUS UPRISING
CyberGW

Your ONM covers

Luigi's Mansion 2

By Loryuken
An oft-used piece of artwork, but turning the Nintendo logo into a ghost? Nice.



Kid Icarus Uprising

By niallman212
This cover shows that sometimes all you need is one striking, eye-catching, image.

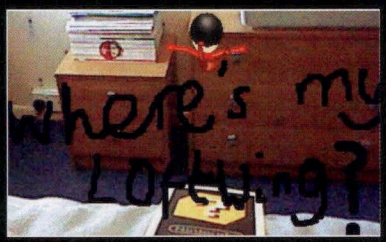
Your AR Pics

This month's funniest – and oddest – 3DS photos

He won't admit it, but deep down Chris would love to be a member of One Direction. Kapo Tsang has made that dream a reality: look how happy he is dancing with the boys.

What do you get when you cross AR cards with Hama beads? You get this ace recreation of Pikmin, courtesy of Luke Arnold.

Congratulations, Sharon Bonfante: you are the very first person to send in an AR picture of a Freakyform! Excellent work.



Maybe Joe Thackway should have told his poor Mii that it didn't live in Skyloft *before* it leapt off the edge of his bed.

Joseph Woollett's Miis are either enjoying the race from some prestigious Lego Bridge seats or are about to effect an ambitious *Wild Bunch*-style ambush on the cars about to hit that card...

Elizabeth Johnson's sleeping cat doesn't realise it, but these Miis are having a big party on it. Surely that's animal cruelty?

Sam Wren's Mii uses a laptop – nothing too fancy there. What's interesting is that he uses a toilet roll as printer paper.

Grab your 3DS and get your photos printed right here by emailing your AR shots to onm@futurenet.com with the subject heading 'Your AR Pics'.

Metal Gear Solid 3

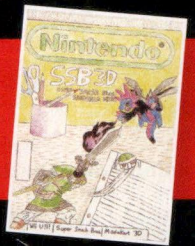
By TurnipHead

We like what TurnipHead's done with the text: everything is well laid out. Classy.

Super Smash Bros. 3D

By Jack Fletcher

We get very few completely hand-drawn covers, and this is awesome. More, please!



Previews

Edited by Steve Hogarty

Planet Nintendo's best forthcoming games

"Absolutely guaranteed to be a marvellously harrowing experience" Project Zero II, Page 38

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Terrifying ghost-snapping fun

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Cute virtual farming with a Dickensian-sounding set-up

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Gorgeous, strategic scrapper

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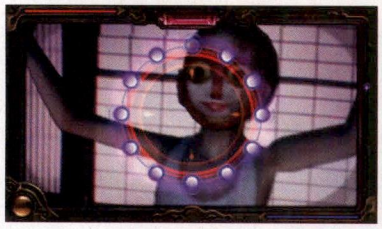
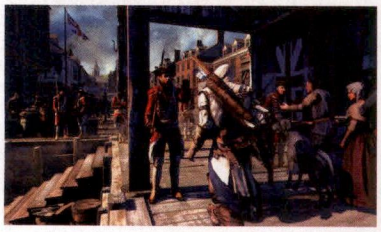
The podgy plumber grabs a racquet for a new spin-off

38 Project Zero II
Quite possibly the most unsettling game ever is now haunting Wii

40 Assassins Creed III
Confirmed for Wii U – we go hands-on with Ubisoft's new epic



Experience what it's like to be Derek Acorah in spooky AR treat *Spirit Camera*.



Finally! A proper *Assassins Creed* game on Nintendo formats! We go hands-on.

Read all the latest Nintendo game previews and news over at:

officialnintendomagazine.co.uk

Kingdom Hearts: Dream Drop Distance sets a new standard for 3DS game visuals.

Kingdom Hearts: Dream Drop Distance

The next best-looking 3DS game?

Info...
- **Publisher** Square Enix
- **Developer** Square Enix
- **Multiplayer** No
- **In a word** Impressive

ETA: Summer 2012

It feels like the latest instalment of the Kingdom Hearts series has been stuck in development for ages. After all, it was one of the first games confirmed for the 3DS when the system was revealed back in June 2010. Now that we've had the chance to sit down with the Japanese version and rack up around three hours of gameplay, we can completely understand why: *Kingdom Hearts: Dream Drop Distance* is easily the most impressive-looking game we've yet seen on Nintendo's handheld.

We've seen a few Kingdom Hearts games on Nintendo systems before, but they didn't feel quite like 'proper' Kingdom Hearts games. *Chain Of Memories* on GBA used a weird card-based battle system, while *Re:coded* and *358/2 Days* on DS may have felt more like the main games, but still differed enough in terms of visuals and gameplay to feel like spin-offs. *Dream Drop Distance*, then, feels like the first fully-fledged Kingdom Hearts game on

> "This is easily the most impressive looking game we've seen on the Nintendo 3DS"

"This invisible donkey is starting to get a lot heavier. I'll need to drop it soon."

Neku from *The World Ends With You* features prominently near the start.

Sometimes it's best to just leg it and give yourself time to set up a special command.

At A Glance

The latest game in the Kingdom Hearts series comes exclusively to the Nintendo 3DS with a revamped battle system.

Well, it's about time Mickey Mouse got a knighthood, if you ask us. Careful with that sword, Minnie: a decapitaion would be proper downer.

The drop sections are really exciting, especially since you get to attack things on the way down. Like skydiving, but with added cartoon violence.

a Nintendo system. In fact, it so clearly follows (and improves upon) the PS2 games that we get the feeling the only reason it wasn't called *Kingdom Hearts 3* was to make sure PlayStation owners didn't get annoyed.

Keyblades Of Glory

The game takes place just before the events of the much anticipated *Kingdom Hearts 3*, which will be out in around 30 years' time at this rate. It follows Sora and Riku, the heroes of the series, as they attempt to go through the sorcerer Yen Sid's special Mark Of Mastery exam in order to become Keyblade Masters. Sora and Riku are warned that the evil Master Xenohort is planning a return and the only way they can stop him is for them both to complete the exam and become Keyblade Masters before he arrives.

To do this, they need to travel to numerous Disney-based worlds and bring them out of their slumber. The all-new worlds in *Dream Drop Distance* were never attacked by the Heartless in previous games. Instead, they're in a state of deep sleep which leaves them disconnected from the other worlds in the Kingdom Hearts universe. If Sora and Riku can visit these worlds and awaken them, they'll become Keyblade Masters.

Within minutes of playing it's abundantly clear that *Dream Drop Distance* is, to all intents and purposes, a proper Kingdom Hearts title. It looks even better than the PlayStation 2 games, the music is sensational, the battle system is real-time (as in the other entries in the main series) and it's essentially heaven for the eyes and ears of any Square Enix and Disney fan.

> "Heaven for the eyes and ears of any Square Enix and Disney fan"

This Rings A Bell

As ever, the new worlds are based on famous Disney movies and cartoons. There are worlds based on *Pinocchio*, *Fantasia*, *The Hunchback Of Notre Dame*, and even *Tron: Legacy* (complete with a surreal Jeff Bridges cameo).

The area that made up the majority of our playthrough, however, was based on the classic Disney cartoon, *The Three Musketeers* (with Mickey, Donald and Goofy as the titular trio – not that rubbish film that came out last year). In this world Riku and Sora have to team up with the Musketeers and help them save the Princess (played by Minnie, naturally) from the evil Pete, with plenty of scraps with enemies along the way. The

With its new "masters competition", the new series of *Total Wipeout* was one slip away from an expensive insurance payout.

Keys To The Kingdom

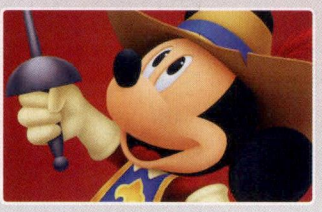
New to Kingdom Hearts? Here's who you'll need to get to know

Sora

The hero, Sora, is a cheery teenager who has been tasked with saving the world from evil. He's an expert with a Keyblade, but has yet to become an official Keyblade Master.

Riku

Sora's best friend was meant to be the rightful Keyblade Master in the original game, but because he chose darkness over light the blade chose Sora. He's all right now, though.



Mickey

That's King Mickey to you. In Kingdom Hearts, the Mickster is the king of Disney Castle and is also a dab hand with a Keyblade. He turns up in the Fantasia and Three Musketeers levels.

Neku

Even if you've never played Kingdom Hearts Neku may be familiar to you as the star of the brilliant DS game, *The World Ends With You*. We're not spoiling why he's in here, though.

That door key wants a bigger chain, surely.

Neku isn't the only character from *The World Ends With You* in the game.

"By the end of your karate training I want you to be able to kick this high, Minnie."

One intriguing and original feature of *Kingdom Hearts: Dream Drop Distance* is that you switch characters when the Drop meter at the bottom of the screen runs out.

enemies that you encounter here are all completely new, incidentally.

Since the worlds in *Dream Drop Distance* have been in a constant sleep state and have never been attacked by Heartless or Nobody (the main enemies in previous Kingdom Hearts games), instead they're under threat from Dream Eaters, bizarre creatures that threaten to destroy each slumbering world by robbing them of their dreams. A bit like more surreal versions of the Big Friendly Giant, but, y'know, evil.

> "Within minutes of playing it's abundantly clear this is a proper Kingdom Hearts title"

Battle mostly involves tapping the A button for standard attacks and throwing in the odd special ability with the X button every now and then. While most of the enemies can be defeated in this way and the combat is satisfying enough, it can get repetitive, which is where free-flowing comes in.

Keep It Flowing

This is a new technique that can be used both in and out of battle and lets you use the environment to create new moves. Press the Y button with nothing around you and you'll perform a simple roll dodge, but do it so your character rolls into a wall, a railing, a column or a larger enemy and you'll trigger a free-flow move, clinging to the object or enemy in question and giving you a brief second to

Hearts On Fire

Our favourite bits from what we've played of the game so far

Boingy Boingy

Befriend the good Dream Eaters and gain their abilities in battle. Our favourite is this big, fat cat-thing that lets you hop on its back and bounce around on it squashing enemies.

Dropping In

The worlds in the game are asleep, which means that you have to drop in on them (hence the name of the game), leading to these excellent skydiving mini-game sections.

Dino Defence

One of the boss battles in the Three Musketeers stage is this dinosaur Dream Eater, which attacks your carriage as you try to save Princess Minnie. Perfect timing is vital.

All For Fun

The cutscenes in this game are hilarious, especially when you're interacting with Mickey, Donald and Goofy. At times it feels just like you're in a classic 1930s cartoon.

Of the friendly Dream Eaters, this is the most impressive so far.

Some of the bosses are ridiculously powerful. Here's an early tip – see that giant fist coming your way? Dodge it, unless you like the idea of a trip to the hospital.

Buckle some swash with Donald Duck.

choose what to do next. If you want to evade your enemy you can press Y again to home in on a different part of the environment and blast over there, or if you want to take them on you can press the A button to spring towards the nearest enemy and deliver a crushing combo attack.

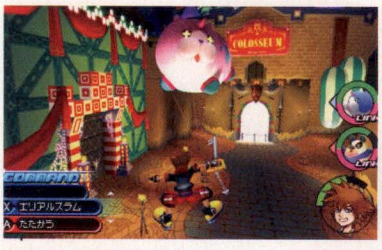
While on paper this environment-based system may sound a little confusing, the handy in-game tutorial makes it clear and within minutes you'll be stringing together ridiculous attacks, wall-jumping and rail-grinding like some sort of Keyblade-wielding chimp.

It's easily the best battle system in the Kingdom Hearts series so far and encourages more creative combat, making the environment really feel like it's part of your playground, rather than just a set of fancy-looking boundaries within which fights must take place.

Creature Comforts

Also new to the fighting system is the addition of more Dream Eaters, but friendlier ones this time. It turns out that while most the Dream Eaters are evil, some have seen the light and will team up with you as you find them throughout the story. Your good Dream Eaters fight alongside you during battles with numerous enemies, and at times you can tap their icon on the touchscreen to perform a link attack, in which both of you team up to do major damage.

Each Dream Eater has their own link attack, so one of them will have you riding it like a giant space hopper as it leaps up and down and crushes enemies,



Traverse Town looks as fantastic as ever, and Dream Eaters add even more colour.

The Beagle Boys are working for Pete. As you'd expect, they're not too bright.

Dream Drop Distance is easily one of the best-looking 3DS games we've seen so far.

The Dream Eater enemies come in all sorts of weird and wonderful forms. Better than those boring Heartless.

This Neko Cat triggers a tricky rhythm mini-game. Nail it to do huge damage.

When in danger, you can call a helicopter to airlift you out of trouble. No, not really.

You can hold the shoulder buttons to lock onto a foe, making it easier to concentrate your attacks on them.

One well-placed Keyblade in the gut and that fat lad would deflate like a third-rate whoopee cushion.

while another is a dancing cat that requires you to press buttons to the beat in a rhythm action style to attack your foes successfully. Much like the wall-leaping shenanigans, it's a fun way to keep battles fresh.

Your collected Dream Eaters can also level up and get extra abilities through a Stat Matrix system similar to that used for the main characters in *Kingdom Hearts Re:coded* on the Nintendo DS. If you want to have a little more fun with them, you can always bring them into the real world with your AR cards.

Drop It Like It's Hot

Since *Dream Drop Distance* is the first 'proper' Kingdom Hearts game to be released on a Nintendo system, it's clear many Nintendo fans interested in it may never have played any of the other main titles in the series, since they were all released on PlayStation 2. Thankfully, it features plenty of ways to compensate for this and help players catch up with the storyline, ways that are so wonderfully designed that even long-time fans of the Kingdom Hearts games will still want to experience them.

Take the game's opening movie, an epic CGI music video that tells the entire story of Kingdom Hearts so far with brand new 3D reimaginings of key moments in the series. Unlike most video game openings, we can see a lot of people gladly opting to watch this in its entirety more than once.

More prominent throughout the story though are memories, which are unlocked at various points in the game. If something happens that refers back to a previous event in the Kingdom Hearts series, you'll be told you've unlocked a memory and be asked if you want to see it. Choose Yes and you'll be treated to a brand new cut-scene re-telling an event from the previous games. It's a fantastic way of filling newcomers in on the details and while it's easy for fans of the series to choose No if they already know the story, the new cut-scenes are so beautifully made that we're sure they'll sit through them all anyway.

This was the general impression we got while playing through the game, in fact. *Kingdom Hearts: Dream Drop Distance* is cleverly balancing itself at all times to ensure it appeals to long-time Kingdom Hearts fans, as well as those new to the series.

Dream Debut

Regardless of which category you fall into, from what we've played so far everything about it – the incredible graphics, the sensational soundtrack, the hours upon hours of full voice acting, the engaging and free battle system, the hilarious cutscenes and the fantastic controls (which are even better when you use a Circle Pad Pro) should have you counting down the days until release. Mark our words, the first Kingdom Hearts game to arrive on Nintendo's newest handheld will be a dream on 3DS.

+Chris Scullion

Aww. If he told us to jump off a cliff, we wouldn't, but we'd still pinch his cheeks.

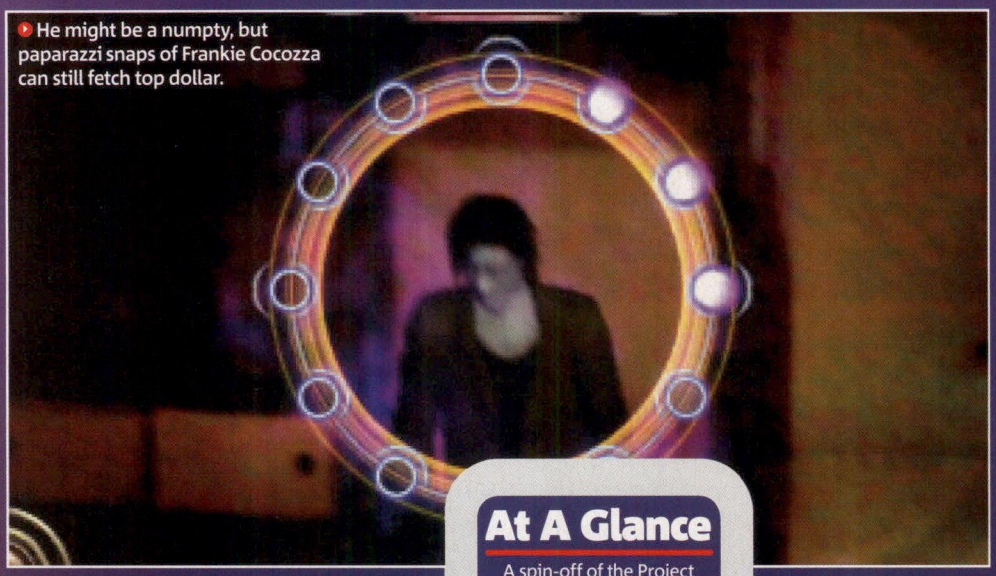
Want this? Play these

Kingdom Hearts: Chain Of Memories
Enjoy great card-based battles.

Kingdom Hearts: 358/2 Days
The first DS game looks the part.

Kingdom Hearts Re:coded
Kill software bugs as a virtual Sora.

> "Everything about it should have you counting down the days: this is going to be absolutely huge"



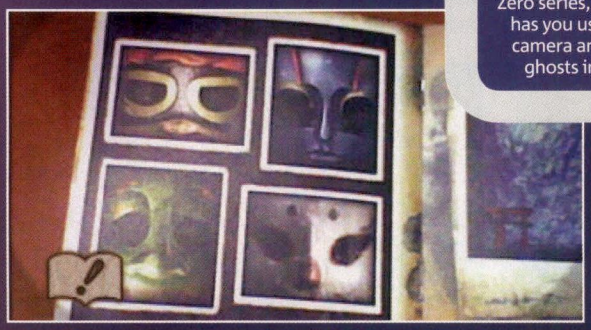
He might be a numpty, but paparazzi snaps of Frankie Cocozza can still fetch top dollar.

Dakota Fanning was shocked by the media's intrusion on her ballet lesson.

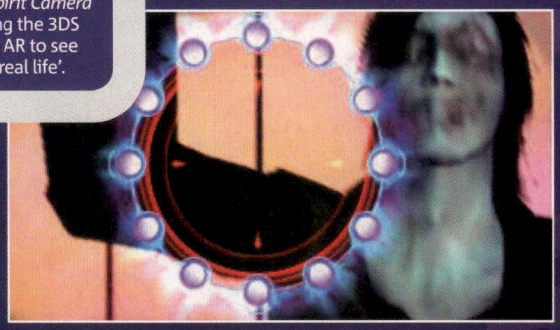
This doll's been in previous Project Zero games. It comes alive, naturally.

At A Glance

A spin-off of the Project Zero series, *Spirit Camera* has you using the 3DS camera and AR to see ghosts in 'real life'.



The Diary of Faces book contains all manner of weird, spooky pictures, which are really just AR markers in disguise.



He really needs to work on his complexion. A bit of sunshine would do him the world of good.

Info...
- **Publisher** Nintendo
- **Developer** Tecmo Koei
- **Multiplayer** No
- **In a word** Sinister

ETA: Summer 2012

Spirit Camera: The Cursed Memoir

167 per cent more terrifying than anything Derek Acorah's ever done

Fans of the terrifying Project Zero series (Fatal Frame elsewhere in the world) are in for a treat this year. Not only is a remake of the second game coming to the Wii later in 2012 (see page 38 for more on that little beauty), before that the 3DS will also be getting its very own Project Zero spin-off, one that will make the hairs on your head stand up so straight people may mistake you for Guile from Street Fighter.

Spirit Camera has been confirmed for a European release, meaning this creepy, AR-based ghost hunting game will definitely be making its way to our shores in a couple of months. It tells the story of Maya, a mysterious girl who has been cursed and made to hide in the darkness of a creepy house that's haunted by a menacing woman in black. It's up to you to free Maya from the curse, get her out of that house and get her settled in a nice bungalow in Durham (that last bit doesn't actually happen, but we'd like to think that's what *could* happen).

> "Your 3DS becomes the Camera Obscura from the Project Zero games"

That's A Booking

The trick is that this isn't any old third-person survival horror game, or a horror-themed lightgun shooter. Instead, *Spirit Camera* is bundled with the Diary Of Faces, a creepy 16-page notebook containing loads of images that act as hidden AR markers. Using the book, your 3DS essentially becomes the mythical Camera Obscura from the Project Zero games, the special device that can see and capture ghosts when you look through it.

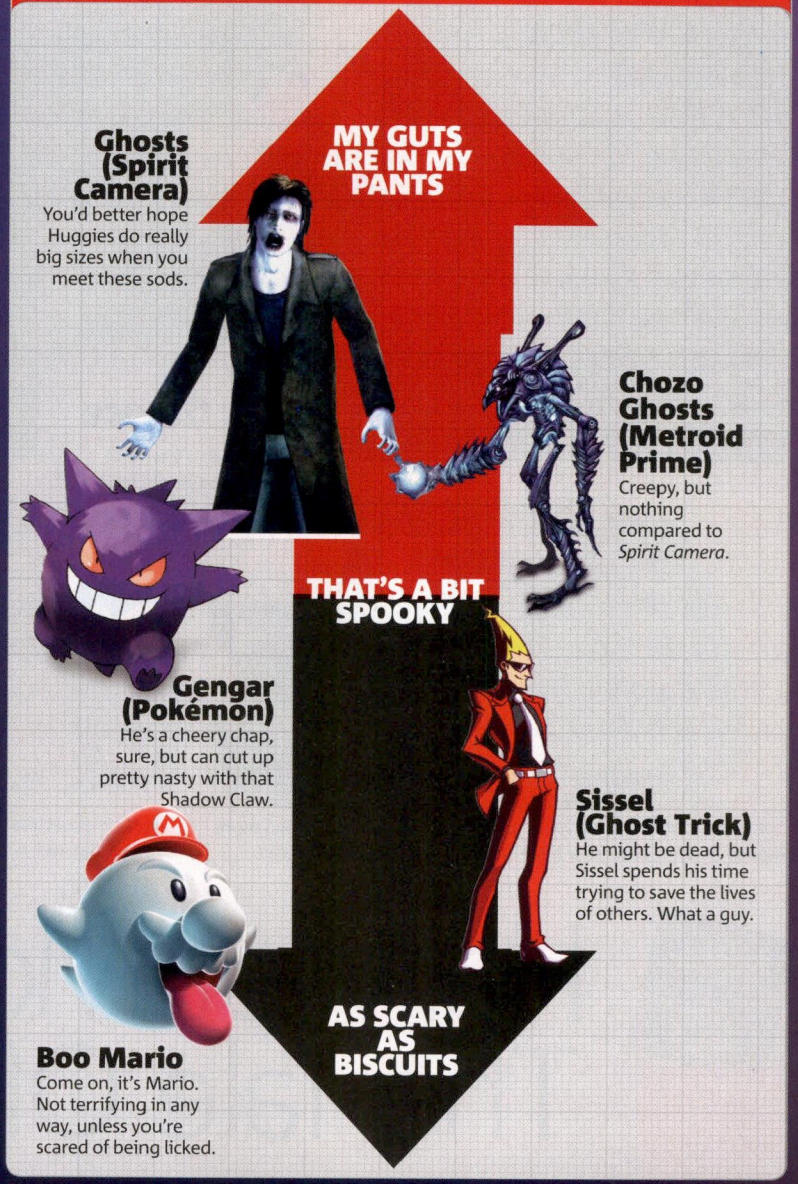
Depending on which point you're at in the game's Story Mode, pointing your 3DS at different pages in the Diary Of Faces will make various creepy augmented reality-based things happen right in front of you. Sometimes a ghost will come out of the book, seemingly floating around your house and no doubt causing any onlookers to lose control of their toilet bits as their body breaks down in unbridled horror.

At other times, the pages of the book themselves will come to life with video cutscenes and animations appearing in AR through your screen, further

Maya, wearing the very definition of a haunted expression.

We Ain't Afraid Of (Some) Ghosts

Our patented Spook-o-Meter sorts phantasmal wheat from chaff



Ghosts (Spirit Camera)
You'd better hope Huggies do really big sizes when you meet these sods.

Chozo Ghosts (Metroid Prime)
Creepy, but nothing compared to *Spirit Camera*.

Gengar (Pokémon)
He's a cheery chap, sure, but can cut up pretty nasty with that Shadow Claw.

Sissel (Ghost Trick)
He might be dead, but Sissel spends his time trying to save the lives of others. What a guy.

Boo Mario
Come on, it's Mario. Not terrifying in any way, unless you're scared of being licked.

progressing the story and explaining some of the mysteries surrounding Maya so you can finally figure out exactly what happeend to her. Some pages will even summon players to enter the house itself virtually, experiencing all the creepy goings-on inside it as you try to locate Maya.

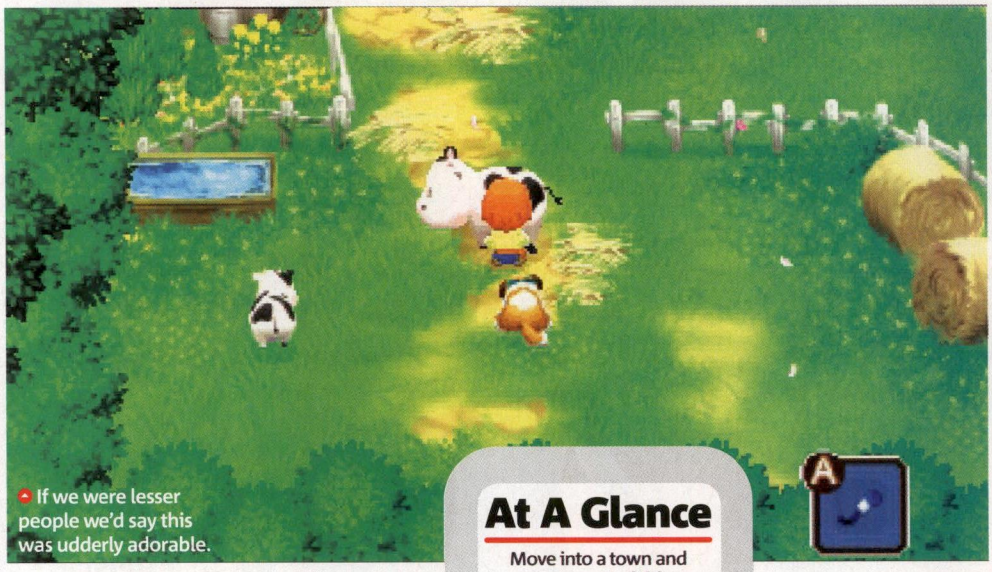
Spooky Snaps

As well as the main Story mode, *Spirit Camera* has a whole bunch of other modes to extend the game's lifespan. The Spirit Photography mode enables you to take photos with your 3DS as normal, then watch in terror as ghosts and other haunting visions appear on your snaps. Meanwhile, Spirit Check asks you to take a photo of either yourself or your friends, then shows you the evil spirits lingering around them. It's like that bit in *The Sixth Sense* where Bruce Willis looks at the kid's family photos and sees the orbs around him, only this time it'll be actual ghosts. And you won't realise at the end that you're a ghost either, even though it should've been obvious after that guy shot you.

Finally, Spirit Challenge is a *Face Raiders*-style mode in which you can put your friends' faces on different ghosts then try to catch it as it flies around your room, taunting you and no doubt badmouthing you for subjecting your friend to such a macabre act.

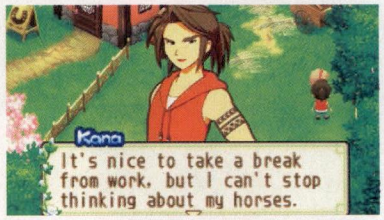
We were a little worried that *Spirit Camera* might not offer much beyond its main story, but the announcement of this suite of kooky extra modes, along with a bunch of mini-games that we're told will also use the Diary Of Faces in some way, should provide plenty of extra value for money. We'll brave it on your behalf in our review soon and let you know if it's worth your cash.

Chris Scullion



If we were lesser people we'd say this was udderly adorable.

There are two ways to fish. Either use a fishing rod, or wade in there and grab one.



Hmmm. That's the sort of sentence that would have us worrying, to be honest.

At A Glance

Move into a town and become a successful farmer in the latest instalment of Marvelous's popular farming series.

You start off with only cows and chickens but as you make more money and improve your fields you can bring in other beasts.

As in most Harvest Moon games you can get married. Is Georgia a contender?

Info...
- **Publisher** Rising Star Games
- **Developer** Marvelous Interactive
- **Multiplayer** No
- **In a word** Conflicted

ETA: Summer 2012

Harvest Moon: The Tale Of Two Towns

With a "cluck cluck" here and a "press A to continue" there

This is one of those titles that sticks to a philosophy of not fixing what ain't broken, because for some reason people will keep buying them. *The Tale Of Two Towns* is the nineteenth Harvest Moon game since the series launched way back in 1996 and this time, while much remains the same, there's at least one big decision you'll have to make that shakes things up substantially.

The game begins with your little farmer chap turning up at a new island (you get to name it) and encountering the leaders of two different towns, Konohana and Bluebell. These have had a bit of a falling out and the reason will chill you to the bone. They disagree on farming techniques.

Your first big decision is whether to move to Konohana or Bluebell, the outcome determining what you'll spend the first half of the game doing.

More Farm Than Good

Bluebell is a western-type farm with thatched cottages and the like. They focus on livestock and you'll be expected to take care of the animals.

Happier animals make better produce, which means you earn more ba-ba-bling at market that can then used to buy new animals and equipment. It's pretty much that circle of life thing Elton John used to bleat on about, only without lions.

Choose to set up in Konohana, though and you won't find an animal anywhere. Instead, this Asian-style arable farm has fields as far as the eye can see, and it'll be up to you to take care of them, being sure to plant seeds, water the plants and harvest them at the right time.

The general aim is to take part in various festivals and use your skills to win the competitions there, while ultimately bringing both towns together and getting them to kiss and make up, at which point you'll be able to work on both animals and fields at the same time.

Locking away half the gameplay until much later on is a very bold move for a Harvest Moon game, but from what we've played so far, the story really helps to keep things interesting. We'll find out soon if it works out in the long run.

+ Chris Scullion

> "Locking away half of the gameplay until much later on is a very bold move"

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You'll need to carefully think about each battle to make sure your best fighters don't snuff it.

How you position your units can mean life or death on the battle grid.

The action is turn-based, with battle animations to keep things interesting.

At A Glance

The thirteenth Fire Emblem game is a new adventure with some useful optional aids to make it easier for series newcomers.

The art style during dialogue is an interesting mix of 2D illustrations and 3D polygon models. We reckon it works well.

Your fighters can all level up, becoming stronger as they do.

Info...
- **Publisher** Nintendo
- **Developer** Intelligent Systems
- **Multiplayer** TBC
- **In a word** Epic

ETA: Autumn 2012

Fire Emblem: Awakening

Strategic scrapping makes its long-awaited return

Did you buy a 3DS before it had its price cut? Are you, therefore, a 3DS Ambassador? Did you download the 10 free Game Boy Advance games? Did you play *Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones*? What do you mean, "no"? Hurry up, go and play it. Don't worry, we'll wait for you. Go on.

It's really good, isn't it? Now can you see why we're so excited about another Fire Emblem game coming to 3DS? Lovely. Let's excitedly count down the days together, then. Although there's already been a Fire Emblem game on the DS, that was a remake of the NES original. *Fire Emblem: Awakening* is the first brand new game in the series since *Radiant Dawn* was released on the Wii five years ago, and that's cause for celebration.

In a first for the Fire Emblem series, one of the game's two main characters has to be created by the player, much like in *Dragon Quest IX*. Your customised character begins the game with amnesia and near the start of the story they'll meet up with the other main character, Krom, as well as his sister Rizu.

Perfectly Kromulent

Krom is the prince of the Kingdom of Iris. He's also marked with the symbol of a dragon, as is your created character. When the two meet, it causes two sleeping dragons to awaken (thereby explaining the game title) and start wrecking the joint. It's up to Krom and your DIY warrior to give the dragons a slap and restore peace to the world.

A controversial inclusion in *Awakening* is the ability to turn off permadeath. For the uninformed, permadeath has been one of the key aspects of the Fire Emblem series since it began. Essentially, it means that if one of the characters in your team dies in the game, they're dead forever and can't fight for you in later battles.

This greatly increases the tension, as while you'll undoubtedly have some strong members of your army who you'd consider your favourites, you'll lose them forever if you send them out to battle and they take a kicking. It's an exciting risk/reward system that makes each battle feel important. It would seem Nintendo has decided that not everyone can

> "Regular downloadable content will include new episodes and maps"

Fighting Fit

How the main character appears is down to you. Here are some looks to try out

The Emotional

This is absolutely perfect for achieving that 'I've just dipped my head in a bucket of whitewash and now I'm looking for a scrap' look.

The Quirky

That eyepatch may lend you an air of monocular, piratical cool, but it's not great for depth perception, we're afraid. Avoid cliff-side walks.

The Bookworm

It's long been accepted that words are less powerful than actions. That book of yours won't do you much good in a real man's fight, poindexter.

The Femme Fatale

She doesn't look too happy, does she? Maybe someone's tried to pierce a Capri Sun carton with that pointy chin of hers. It can happen.

The Cutesy-Poo

Well, it wouldn't be a Japanese game without the option to change your hair an unusual colour, would it? How's about duck-egg blue.

The Tortured Giant

No wonder he's unhappy, it looks like someone's mixed tomato sauce in with his shampoo again. Comes with additional sculpted sideburns.

The Noble Warrior

This is probably the guy we'd create. Not particularly hard-looking , but he seems like the sort of chap you could trust with your pin number.

The Ex-Convict

Not too sure about that barnet, mate. You look as though you've been brutally attacked by a gang of novice barbers with blunt scissors.

That's just what we were about to say actually, but he got in there first.

Bob didn't have the bottle to tell Alf that his cape looked a bit rubbish.

handle that sort of pressure, though, so should you so desire you can now turn off permadeaths, which means that if your best archer gets an axe in his guts, he can shrug it off for the next battle.

No doubt many hardcore gamers will be livid at this, but much like the Super Guide in the Mario games and the Visions system in *Ocarina Of Time 3D*, it's only optional – indeed, as well as the ability to keep permadeath on, there are also two harder difficulty settings for those who want a real challenge.

The Fire Still Burns

What happens when you finish the game on its hardest difficulty, though? Is that the end of your *Fire Emblem: Awakening* affair? Pfft, as if. Nintendo will be releasing regular downloadable content for the game, coming in the form of new episodes and maps. It's worth bearing in mind that these episodes won't be part of the main game – that will be a standalone story so you don't need to worry about hidden charges to see how it all ends – and that the first set of DLC will be free for the first month of the game's release, so you can decide for yourself if future sets will be worth the moolah.

> "With regular DLC this could be an incredible title for strategy fans"

We reckon this is a great policy since it sort of reduces that fear of the unknown we usually get when buying DLC on other systems, and we're hopeful that it's successful enough to encourage Nintendo to use the same system for any future 3DS or Wii U games that may offer paid downloadable content.

Intelligent Design

With gorgeous cel-shaded cutscenes, character designs by Yusuke Kozaki (who designed the characters in the No More Heroes games) and the promise of regular DLC, this could be an incredible title for strategy fans.

All we need now is confirmation of some sort of online multiplayer, but considering Intelligent Systems have provided this in the past with the Advance Wars games we're hopeful it'll do the same this time around. Of course, even if it doesn't, it's another brand new Fire Emblem title and for that reason alone, we're sold.

+ Chris Scullion

Bowser might be slow, but his shots are immensely powerful.

It's the battle of the princesses. Hope they don't grunt like the Williams sisters.

Better hope that one's got spin on it, or they'll be fishing it out the stands.

At A Glance

Camelot's latest entry in the much-loved Mario Tennis series offers online multiplayer and touchscreen controls.

It's important to aim your serve well to start your opponent off on the wrong foot. Princess Peach gives it some regal welly.

Get under a lob and you can smash the ball like a boss. Take that, Bowser.

Info...
- **Publisher** Nintendo
- **Developer** Camelot
- **Multiplayer** 1-4
- **In a word** Ace

ETA: May 2012

Mario Tennis Open

It's got a new name and new features. It's new, basically

Ever since it was revealed that a new Mario Tennis game was on the way, things have been very quiet over at Camelot Software Planning, the much-loved studio working on the game. Finally, though, new information has been outed that gives a much better idea of what lies in store for the final game when it arrives in May.

Mario Tennis Open, as it's now known, appears at this point to have ditched the elaborate, over-the-top special moves that featured in the GameCube Mario Tennis games and will instead offer more traditional gameplay akin that to that seen in the Mario Tennis titles on the Game Boy Advance, Game Boy Color and Nintendo 64. While some may be disappointed at this lack of zaniness, we reckon it was the smart move to make, because it's generally agreed that the special moves are what take the shine off the weaker Mario sports games.

> "The over-the-top special moves have been ditched: this was a smart move"

The game can be controlled in a number of different ways, depending on your skills. Traditional gamers will want to go with the standard Circle Pad and buttons approach, with each button allowing for a different kind of shot: X for a standard shot, B for a slice and so on. Combinations of buttons also lead to slightly more complex shots, so if you want to play a drop shot, for example, you should press B, then A.

Touching And Stroking

Some gamers will find it hard to remember which button performs what type of stroke, so for them there's an optional touchscreen control method. On the bottom screen are coloured panels representing various shots, so all you need to do is tap the right panel to perform the required shot.

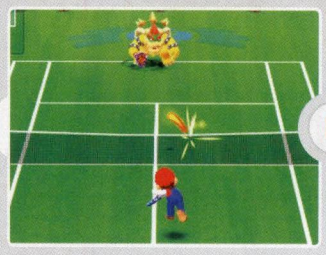
Taking it further are the (also optional) coloured icons that appear on the court. These will appear on your side every time your opponent hits the ball, and show the most advantageous place to stand and the best shot to hit.

Stand on the icon and press the touchscreen panel with the matching colour and you'll hit what the game reckons is the optimum shot. Of course, just to clarify, all this is entirely optional and you can play the game in the traditional manner if you prefer.

Also optional is the gyroscope control. With it turned on you can hold the 3DS up in front of your face at any point during the game to switch the viewpoint

Strokes Of Genius

Not clued up on tennis? Here are some of the strokes you can perform in *Mario Tennis Open*



Flat Shots

A flat shot simply goes straight over the net in whatever direction you choose. It's relatively fast, but it shouldn't catch out decent players.

Slices

Cutting through the ball with your racquet makes it curve through the air. A well-aimed slice will force your opponent well out of position.

Drop Shots

If your opponent likes to play at the back of the court, dink the ball just over the net, meaning they have to run forward quickly to retrieve it.

Lobs

If your opponent is at the net, lob them, looping the ball over their head. If they anticipate it, though, they'll step back and smash it.

A well-aimed shot in doubles matches is one that confuses both opponents at once. Mario dishes out some baseline punishment.

> "We can see this eating up an unhealthy amount of our time"

instantly to right behind your player, enabling you to look around you with the 3DS gyro as you play. Where you look when making a shot dictates the direction in which the ball travels, enabling you – after a bit of practice – to play some very accurate strokes. Your player runs automatically, *Wii Sports* style, when you switch to this viewpoint, but you can take over with the Circle Pad if you'd rather. At the moment, due to all the swift turning that is necessary, the 3D effect is turned off entirely in this viewpoint, though this may change.

The game looks just as good as *Mario Power Tennis* on GameCube. Impressive.

As you might expect, Bowser's court is a suitably dark affair. Come on, Mario!

The final big addition to *Mario Tennis Open* so far is online play through the Nintendo Network. You'll be able to play against your friends or take part in special Open Matches that pit you against opponents of a similar skill.

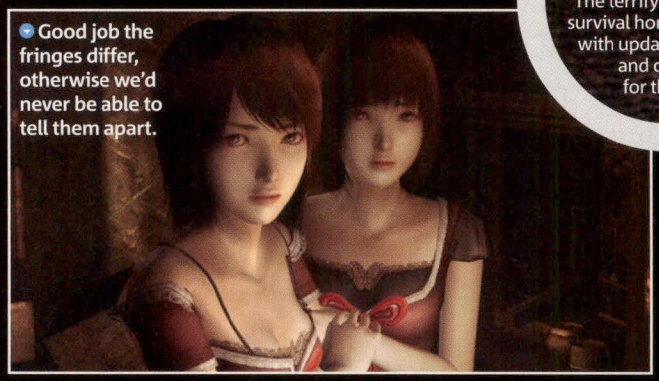
With various medals to collect, monthly leaderboards to battle one's way up the rankings and the ability to customise your Mii with new outfits and equipment, we can see this eating up an unhealthy amount of our time.

+Chris Scullion

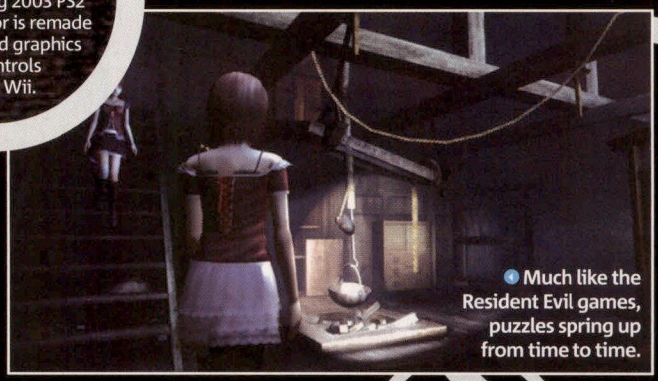
Sue was terrified. This wasn't even her house and she'd just spilled red wine on the carpet.

At A Glance

The terrifying 2003 PS2 survival horror is remade with updated graphics and controls for the Wii.



Good job the fringes differ, otherwise we'd never be able to tell them apart.



Much like the Resident Evil games, puzzles spring up from time to time.

Info...
- **Publisher** Nintendo
- **Developer** Tecmo
- **Multiplayer** No
- **In a word** Gaaaah!

ETA: Winter 2012

Project Zero 2

The scariest game of all time gets a suitably terrifying Wii makeover

When you think of the survival horror genre the usual suspects are likely to spring to mind – Resident Evil and Silent Hill, most likely. Plenty of horror games have come and gone over the years, but it is those two series that resonate most with gamers today – this wasn't always the case, though. Back in the GameCube days there was another horror series on PlayStation 2 systems that was held in similarly high regard.

The Project Zero games (or Fatal Frame, as they were known elsewhere) were a terrifying series of titles that featured ghosts as their main villains, rather than the usual zombies or mutants you find in most horror games. These games were all about laying on the eerie atmosphere to leave you wondering where your next ethereal assailant was likely to appear from.

Why are we telling you all this, though? Well, while *Project Zero 4* was released on Wii in Japan a couple of years ago but sadly never made it over to Blighty, Nintendo of Europe has already confirmed that the remake of *Project Zero II: Crimson Butterfly* (widely considered to be the scariest in the series) will be heading to the UK before the year's out.

For those unfamiliar with *Project Zero II*, the game tells the story of twin sisters, Mio and Mayu, who learn that a place in which they used to play as children is about to be swallowed by a dam. They decide to visit it one last time for nostalgia's sake, but once there Mayu spots an odd crimson butterfly and follows it into the woods. Mio follows after her sister and the two end up in a creepy, fog-consumed village inhabited, it soon emerges, by tortured souls of the dead who are forced to relive their ends over and over again. So it's a lot like Hull city centre in many respects.

> "Tortured souls are made to re-live their own deaths. It's just like being in Hull"

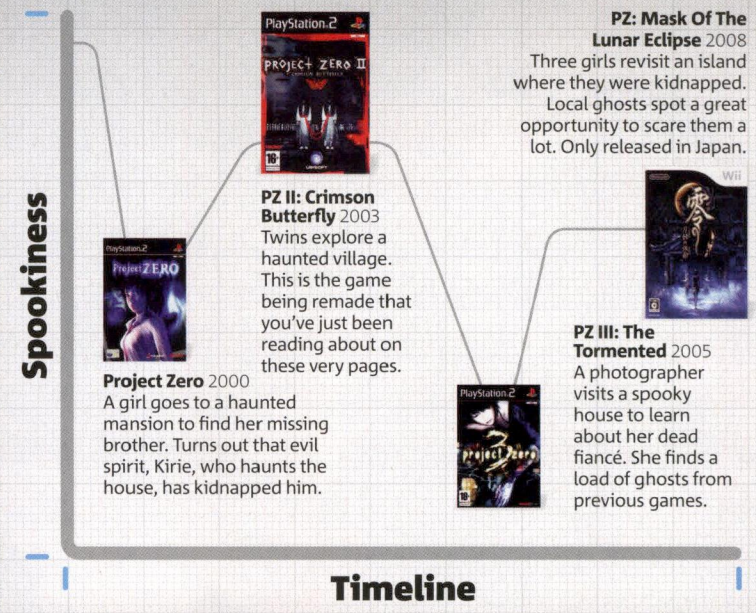
I See Dead People

For most of the game you'll be playing as Mio, led deeper into the village as she continues to follow Mayu, who has fallen under its spell. As you progress you'll slowly find out more about a terrifying ritual, one involving twins and the probable reason the two have been led there, in true horror style. But we'll say no more because that would probably count as spoilers.

Like the other games in the series, *Project Zero II* is interesting in that, since you're dealing with ethereal beings, there are no weapons to be found in the game. You can't exactly attack a supernatural entity with a chainsaw, after all. Instead, you're fortunate enough to have the mysterious Camera Obscura in your possession. This special

"Please don't be alarmed. I am merely a ghost who wants to eat your mind."

Four More Zeroes The history of Project Zero



Project Zero 2000
A girl goes to a haunted mansion to find her missing brother. Turns out that evil spirit, Kirie, who haunts the house, has kidnapped him.

PZ II: Crimson Butterfly 2003
Twins explore a haunted village. This is the game being remade that you've just been reading about on these very pages.

PZ III: The Tormented 2005
A photographer visits a spooky house to learn about her dead fiancé. She finds a load of ghosts from previous games.

PZ: Mask Of The Lunar Eclipse 2008
Three girls revisit an island where they were kidnapped. Local ghosts spot a great opportunity to scare them a lot. Only released in Japan.

The lighting is much improved when compared to the original PS2 version.

We're no letting agents, but there are probably better areas to move into.

camera enables you to see ghosts when you look through its lens, and its coloured filament (somehow) tells you what sort of mood they're in – if it's blue the ghost is friendly and is likely to help you out and give you advice, but if it's orange it's a little more grumpy. These evil ghosts are more than happy to do harm to you by... well, doing whatever it is that tormented ghouls of departed souls do to those on the other side of the veil. Going "ooga-booga" and waving some clanky spectral chains around a bit is the very least you can expect.

You've Been Framed!

Luckily, the Camera Obscura uses special film that can exorcise the ghosts if you take photos of them (you can't get that sort of service with a camera phone). At first you'll be armed with basic Type-07 film, but as you progress you'll find higher quality stock that is more likely to capture the spook.

We're extremely excited about the prospect of playing this classic horror game again. It'll be interesting to see whether it's a simple port with enhanced graphics, or new content has been added, like the extra ending added to the Xbox version back in 2004.

Either way, for those who never played it the first time around, *Project Zero II* is absolutely guaranteed to be a marvellously harrowing experience for the eyes, ears and bowels. Bustin' has rarely felt better than this.

+ Chris Scullion

"Guaranteed to be a marvellously harrowing experience for your eyes, ears and bowels"

At A Glance

Real-life history mixed with tin-foil hat conspiracy in a gripping and stunningly beautiful epic action adventure.

You're an adept fighter, but ideally you'll completely avoid combat.

Info...
- **Publisher** Ubisoft
- **Developer** Ubisoft Montreal
- **Multiplayer** TBC
- **In a word** Legendary

ETA: Winter 2012

Assassin's Creed III

Prepare for the Nintendo Wii U's first genuinely killer game

Most games about killing people take such a clumsy approach to it. You're left attempting to tap-dance out of the way of a hail of bullets, occasionally popping out from behind a dustbin to chuck your own deadly spray of return fire. In the achingly stylish Assassin's Creed series, you literally wouldn't be seen dead making such an unseemly hash of it all.

This is a game about slinking up behind someone in public and opening them up a new windpipe with the Assassins' trademark hidden wristblade, leaving them quietly wheezing and gurgling their last as you slip away into the crowd. The iconic image of a white hooded assassin has been a constant in previous games in the series. As has the ability to 'hide in plain sight' by blending into large groups of people and the opportunity to use the city to your advantage by climbing walls and skipping across rooftops using your parkour skills. This is about being a scalpel, rather than a lump-hammer.

> "What a plot: the epic storyline spans 35 years in the life of Connor"

While there are always technically two stories progressing during any given Assassin's game, one of which is set in a sci-fi-flavoured 2012, the bulk of the action always takes place in a real historical setting.

Previous games have seen hooded heroes clambering all over the Medieval Middle East and Renaissance Italy but for this third instalment, planned to be the biggest and best yet, the development team has chosen an entirely new chapter from the textbook.

What this means is that, while you might need to be brought up to speed for the bookending sections set in the present day, *Assassin's Creed III* will feature a historical plot that can be enjoyed from start to finish with no prior knowledge whatsoever.

And what a plot. Set during the time of the American Revolution in the 18th century, it's described as an "epic storyline" that will span 35 years of the life of Connor, a half-English, half-Native American assassin.

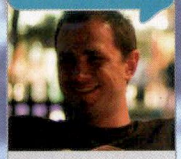
You're History

One of the pleasures of playing an Assassin's Creed game is immersing yourself in a historically accurate world. Authenticity is one of the development team's main priorities, which is why around 80 per cent of the speaking characters in that epic storyline are real historical figures.

You'll be nattering with the founding fathers of America, including George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, as their home makes the transition between being a far-flung British colony to an entirely new country. The two cities you'll be exploring are Boston and New York, both of which contain landmarks

Should you find yourself in a fight, Connor is handy with weapons.

Dev Talk

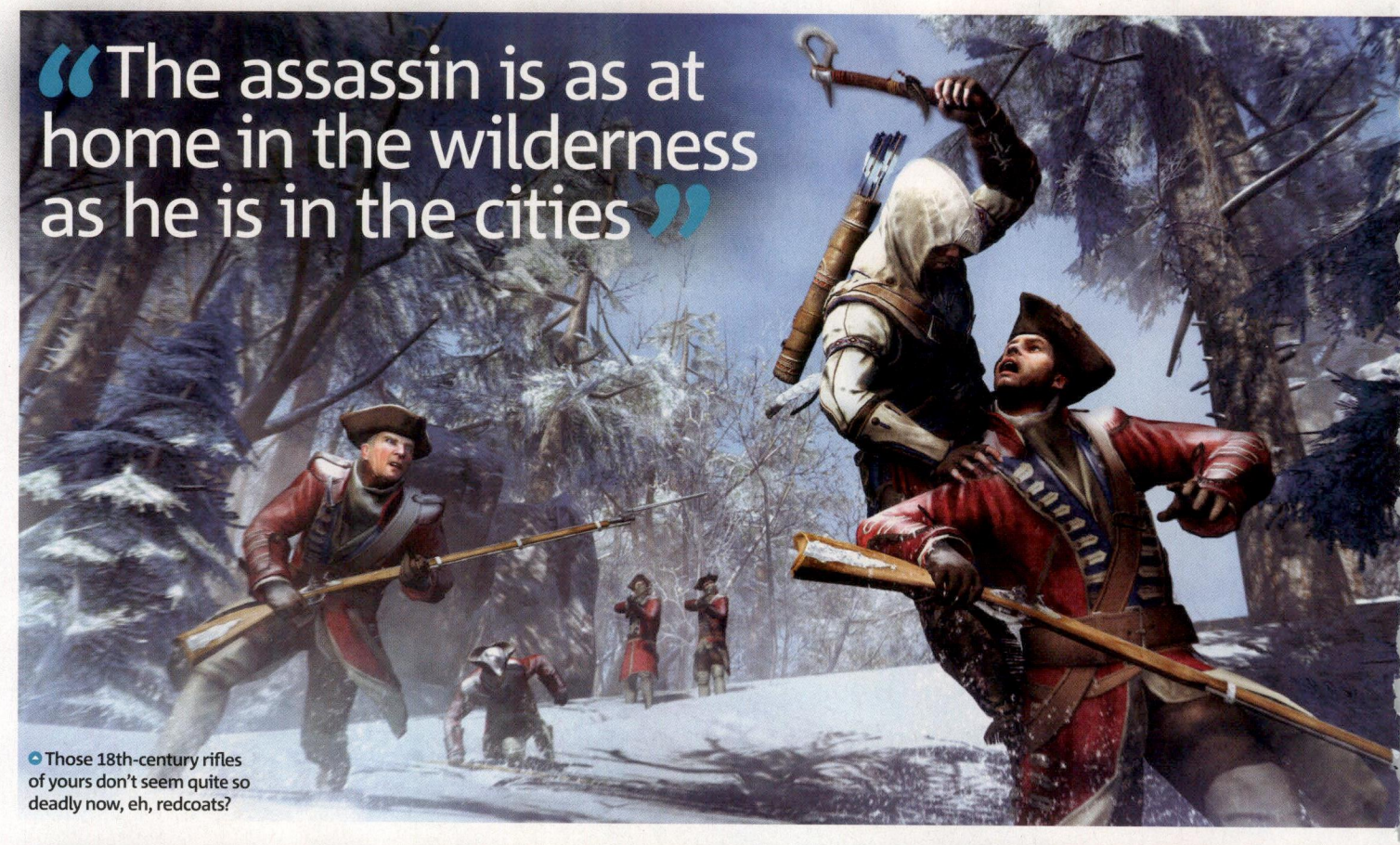


Alex Hutchinson

- **Company** Ubisoft Montreal
- **Job** Creative Director

"We chose the American Revolution because it's untouched. It's a period that no other games can really get into. If you want to make a shooter, it doesn't work because the guns are terrible."

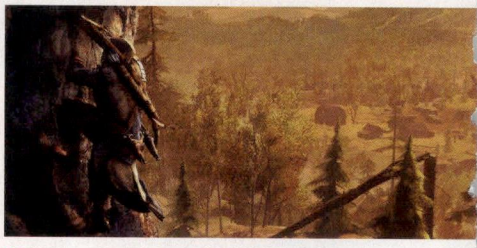
"The assassin is as at home in the wilderness as he is in the cities"



Those 18th-century rifles of yours don't seem quite so deadly now, eh, redcoats?

Connor's monkey-like tree-climbing skills enable ambushes launched from above.

"I'll ask you one more time. Have you been nicking my milk from the fridge?"



The scenery is stunningly rendered with some truly spectacular vistas to enjoy.

that you can still find today. The Old State House in Boston is there and can be clambered over, and the layout of the lower third of Manhattan is much as it is today, including Wall Street and the bottom end of Broadway.

It's not just people and places that are represented, though. Key events from the period will occur too. In 1776 a huge fire gutted large chunks of New York and you'll experience both devastating fire and the aftermath that changed the cityscape forever.

But while the Revolutionary War serves as a backdrop, and while Connor has British heritage, he won't be siding with either the Americans or the British, save for the fact he thinks independence for the colony is broadly a good thing.

His priority is the seemingly never-ending war between the Assassins and their sworn enemies, the Templars. As a Native American who grew up in a Mohawk village, he's also concerned about the role his people will play in this new nation. For the first time in the series, Connor is as comfortable in the wilderness as he is in the cities.

While Boston and New York are bustling towns, full of buildings to shin up, it's the Frontier that is the big news for this instalment. A completely new animation system enables Connor to take advantage of the natural environment: he can climb and leap through forests, getting the drop – literally – on his enemies from the branches of trees. Watching Connor leap between boughs and glide effortlessly around tree-trunks in order to tail a group of British Redcoat soldiers is enormously impressive.

Wild At Heart

No matter how good you are at quickly scrabbling up trees, you won't be entirely safe out in the countryside. For a start, not all of the wildlife in this untamed wilderness is friendly. In one sequence, Connor is attacked by an enormous grizzly bear and it's only by hitting the 'counter' button at the right time that you dodge its swipes and buy yourself enough time to skewer it with your wristblade. As the game progresses, apparently you'll be able to hunt animals in the forest, using their meat and skin for as-yet-unrevealed purposes.

The other big danger in the Frontier is the weather. Winters in the northeast of America were harsh – to the point where many Patriot soldiers froze to death during the winter of 1776 – and during certain periods in the story you'll find yourself slowed down by deep snow that will force you to change your tactics.

When your stealthy approach fails you and you're forced into a confrontation, you'll find Connor is pretty handy with a variety of weapons. While Assassin's Creed has always been a game about hand-to-hand combat, it's an unavoidable fact that the American Revolution was fought with guns.

Fortunately for the design team, those guns don't really shoot all that straight and take a long time to reload, which means that, providing you don't wander directly in front of an army of soldiers,

Cast List

George Washington
The future first US President, you'll see him go from army general to national talisman.

Benjamin Franklin
The kite-flying electric visionary, Franklin was also a key political figure of the era.

Charles Lee
Embittered after being passed over for the top role in the army. Was into small dogs and revenge.

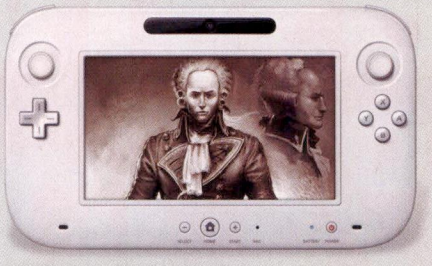
Whatever is in that horse-drawn cell will be either liberated or dead before too long, we'd wager. Also note the tomahawk jazzed up with the Assassin's Creed logo.

Deadly Touch

Three ways in which Assassin's Creed III could take advantage of the Wii U controller

Eagle Vision

Assassins benefit from an enhanced vision mode that enables them to spot targets and other important elements in the world. With the Wii U controller, players could hold the tablet up to the screen to see Connor's specialised view.



Animus Database

Assassin's Creed games have always had a huge repository of data on characters, events and locations from the game. With the Wii U controller that info could be provided automatically on the touchscreen as and when you encounter them.

Armoury

With fast and flowing combat, having access to Connor's weapons on a touchpad, rather than forcing players into a radial menu, would enable Wii U players to make the very best use of the game's extensive armoury.

> "This is already looking like one of the Wii U's most spectacular titles"

Despite (or perhaps because of) his mixed heritage, Connor is a broadly apolitical figure with no fixed allegiance to anyone.

you should be able to survive long enough to slice up your foes the old-fashioned way.

The new fighting mechanic for this version is based around having a weapon in each hand and using flowing combinations of both. In addition to that hidden wristblade, you'll be able to use a mean-looking tomahawk (crafted into the shape of the Assassins' logo), the obligatory bow and arrow and the Chinese rope dart, which enables you to truss up your enemies like a Thanksgiving turkey. You will be able to use guns from time to time, but they're not the most effective tools in your armoury.

Independence Day

Connor himself isn't interested in getting involved with the large-scale battles, but that doesn't mean they won't be represented. The game can render up to 2,000 non-player-characters on screen at once, which makes for spectacular views as British and Patriot forces clash in the fields of the Frontier. As an assassin, your role will be to skirt the battleground and take out a key target without getting caught up in the fray itself.

One such target is John Pitcairn, a general in the Battle of Moulton Hill. You'll have the choice of either a path on which you fight isolated pockets of soldiers, or a more stealthy route that sees you climbing up a cliff face to reach your victim. Stray too close to the conflict, though, and you'll end up riddled with bullets.

Assassin's Creed III is already looking like one of Wii U's most spectacular titles, capable of recreating a huge turning point in history in all its scale and subtlety. It's a series that is famed for its animations and controls, both of which have been subtly improved upon for this third instalment.

It's also stunningly beautiful, whether you're leaping through the forest canopy or slipping through the crowded streets of period Boston. Since when have history lessons been this much fun?

+Will Holdsworth

ONM 80

ONM 79

ONM 78

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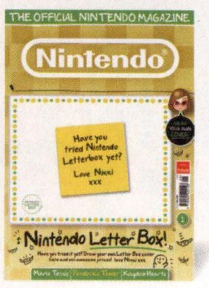

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Everybody likes free things. If I offered you a small dying frog you'd probably take it because it was free. I know I would. And I'd also assume, since you're reading this very issue, that you also like *Official Nintendo Magazine*. Coincidentally, I do too.

So why not combine your love for free things with your love of **ONM** and subscribe to our humble tome? Not only do you get every issue delivered to your door before it hits the shops, you'll also save around 45% of the total cost, meaning you'll effectively get six issues completely free over the course of the year. I recently explained this to my accountant and the poor man's face melted off with delight. So why not subscribe to **ONM**? You'll get the mag before the shops do, save heaps of money and help pay for my accountant's facial reconstruction.

Editor In Chief
Neil Long

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TAKE NOTE

Your definitive guide to the fantastic Nintendo Letter Box

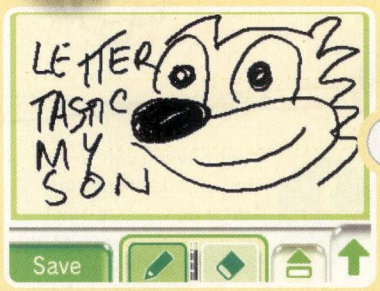
If you haven't yet downloaded Nintendo Letter Box, you're missing out on Nintendo's first big step forward in the wide world of online communication. While it's tinkered with messaging services before – Wii owners could send messages to others and Wii Speak let people chat online – Letter Box is its first unqualified success in this area.

It's not surprising, really, since it combines so many aspects of previous Nintendo creations: the fun of freehand drawing provided by Pictochat and Flipnote Studio, the use of custom stationery as in *Animal Crossing* and the ability to attach photos like you could when messaging over the Wii. By combining all this and adding that typical Nintendo charm, Letter Box has already won many Nintendo gamers over. Here's why you should get involved, too. ✚

"Combine drawing with stationery and the ability to attach pics"

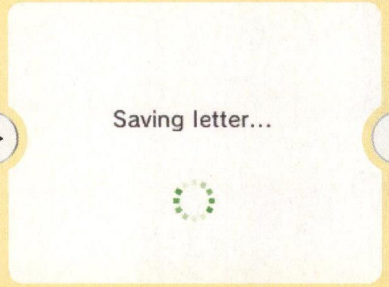
1 Let's Begin At The Beginning

Letter Box is a waste of time if you can't send or receive letters. Here's how



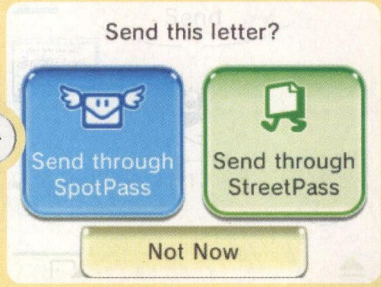
1. The Write Stuff

After choosing the Write A Letter option from the main menu and drawing out your message, choose the Save option.



2. SD And Easy

Your drawing will save to your SD card. This means you don't necessarily have to send it immediately, or even at all.



3. Signed, Sealed, Delivered

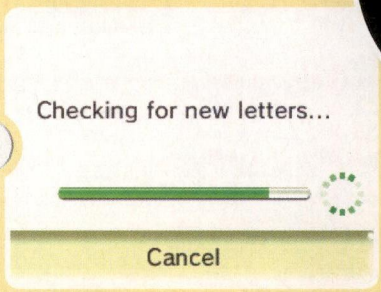
If you want to send it to another 3DS-owning friend, choose the SpotPass option. If not, just cancel.

4. Spot On

Choosing SpotPass brings up a list of your 3DS friends. Tap their face to toggle them on or off, or choose Select All.

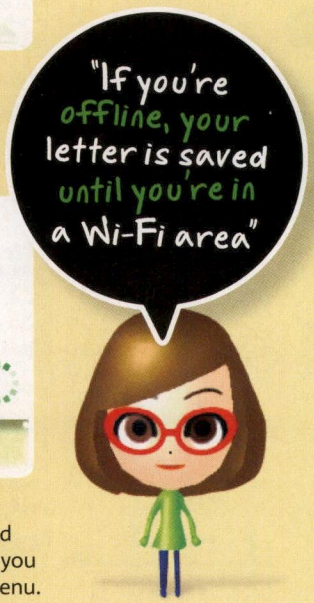
5. Save For Later

Your letter will be marked for sending and saved. If you're offline, the 3DS can hold it until you enter a Wi-Fi area.



6. Mail, Man

If you were online the message should send automatically, but to make sure you can hit Send & Receive on the main menu.



2 The Master Of Unlocking

The more letters you save, the more features you unlock. Here's the order in which you get them

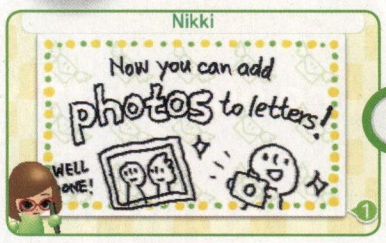
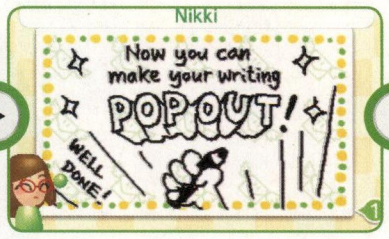


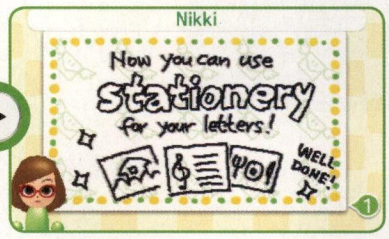
Photo Attachments

Saving a couple of letters unlocks the ability to attach photos. Any photos on your SD card can be used and you can draw over them once they're attached.



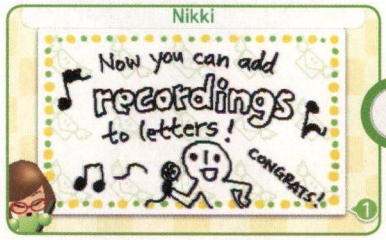
3D Drawing

Save a few more for 3D writing tools. You can write and erase on two different layers, which means that, with clever use of both pens, your letters can look 3D.



Select Stationery

Tired of your boring old white letters? Eventually you'll unlock six types of animated stationery, giving messages an extra dose of awesomeness.

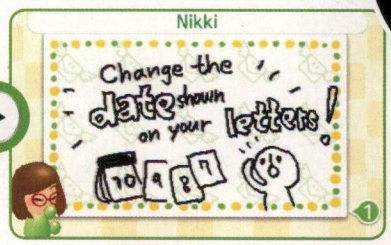


Sound Attachments

Any of the sounds you've recorded in 3DS Sound can be attached as little blobs on your letter. When your recipient taps the blob, they'll hear your sound.

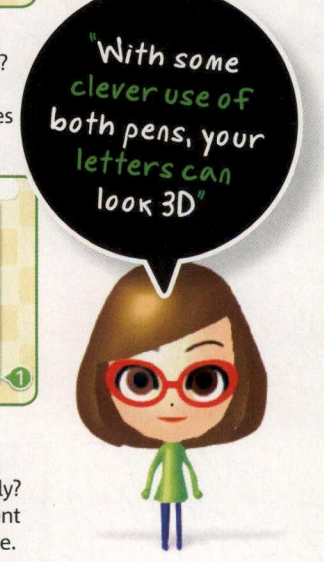
Bonus Stationery

Eventually you'll get bored with the six different types of stationery, so your next unlock is a further 30 types. Each can be unlocked with five Play Coins.



Datestamping

Mate's birthday coming up? Finished your Happy Hallowe'en message early? Slap on a datestamp and your recipient won't be able to open it until that date.



Scribble Taughts

Your at-a-glance guide to the Letter Box compose screen

Letter Preview
The top screen shows what your recipient will see when they get the letter, complete with any 3D effects and animations provided. It's a good way to check that attached photos aren't dizzying.

Drawing Pane
The bottom screen is where you'll write your message using the stylus. If you're using two layers, the current layer you're using will be black and the other layer will be in grey.

Next Page
Each message can consist of up to four pages should you so desire. Hit this arrow to see the other pages if you want to write on them as well.

Message Extras
When everything's unlocked, Attach Photo, Add A Recording, Stationery and Datestamp will all be available when you tap this icon.

Pen Tool
Once you unlock 3D writing, tap on this to switch between the standard and 3D pens. Anything you write with the 3D pen will stand out more on the top screen.

Ink Meter
You only have a certain amount of ink for each message. You should usually have more than enough, but this'll flash when it's running low.

Eraser Tool
As with the pen, the eraser is available in both standard and 3D flavours. Handily, each eraser will only rub out that particular layer.

Okay, Sign Me Up

How to get Letter Box

1. **Get your 3DS online**
Go into the Settings menu and choose the internet option to set this up.

2. **Visit the eShop**
Download any system updates needed. Open the eShop app.

3. **Get Letter Box installed**
If you can't find Letter Box, just search for "letter" using the search at the bottom.

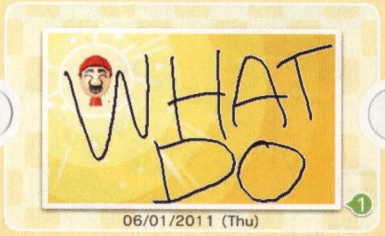
4. **Find friends**
If you don't have any 3DS friends, you might want some. Ask pals to add you or try the **ONM** forums or Facebook page.

3 Lettiquette

ONM presents its dos and don'ts for annoyance-free Letter Boxing

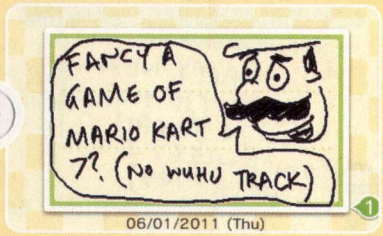
Share new Stationery ✓

Whenever someone sends you special new stationery, it's only right to send a new message to all your friends using it so that they can get it, too.



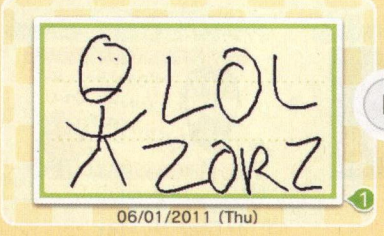
Be Thrifty With Space ✓

If you can fit your message on one page, do so. Multiple pages take longer and people will be annoyed if their four-page letter simply asks how they are doing.



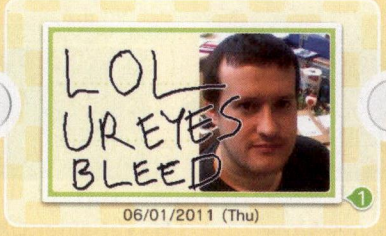
Draw Something ✓

Even if you're just writing a question to someone, draw a quick picture, too. It adds a personal touch and shows you've taken extra time over their letter.



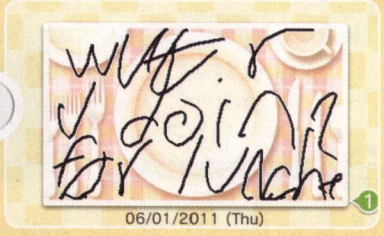
Spam People ✗

Imagine someone's face after they've downloaded 20 letters, only to find that they're all sketches of stickmen. Quality over quantity is key, you see.



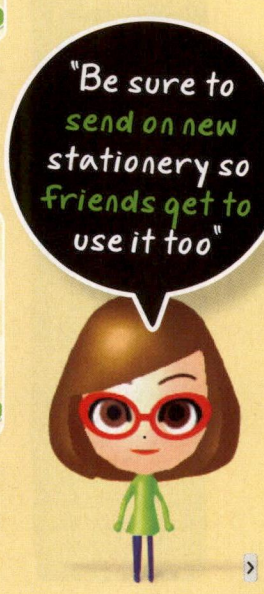
Send Dizzying Photos ✗

If you're attaching a photo, turn 3D on and look at the preview. If it makes you dizzy, go into your photo album and use the circle pad to fix the 3D effect.



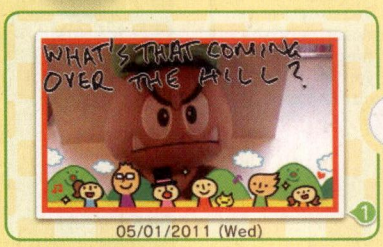
Write Sloppily ✗

Sorry to sound like an English teacher, but since you're not typing your note try not to just scribble a quick message. Take your time and ensure it's legible.



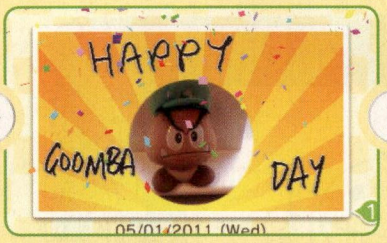
4 Better The Photo You Know

The stationery you choose affects the placement of photos. Here are our favourite examples



Terror Town

If you have a photo of a friend's face, put it on this stationery to make it look like they're stalking tiny people blissfully unaware of their impending doom.



Woop Woop

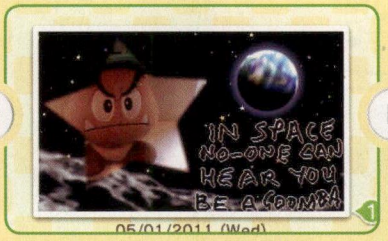
Celebrating something? Maybe it's someone's birthday? Take a relevant photo (like a birthday cake) and stick it on. There's confetti and everything.

Dead Or Alive

Has your mate been up to no good? Did they do something wrong at school and is there a bounty on their head? Send this wanted poster round to shame

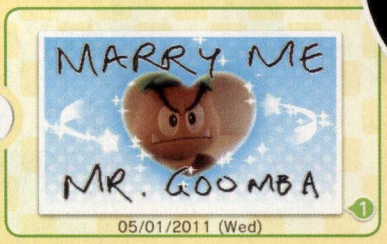
This Just In

Spotted a sale at HMV? Caught your brother dressing up like Lady Gaga? Get a photo (one of the latter scenario might be trickier to obtain) and spread the news in the most appropriate way possible.



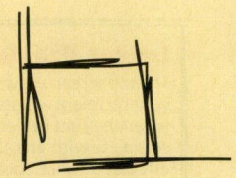
Space Case

Generic space-based stationery? No! You can use it to flatter your nearest and dearest by putting their picture in the star and writing, "You're out of this world!" Hmm, we smell cheese.



Love Is In The Air

You're ready to declare your love to that special someone. Do you send them some flowers? Ask them out to their face? Of course not – you use old faithful, the blue heart stationery.



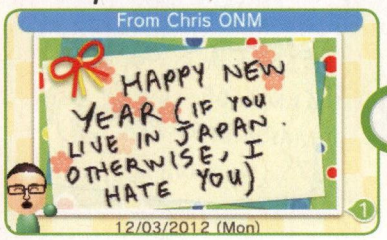
5 Stationery Sensation

Occasionally rare exclusive stationery is released. Here's a checklist of what's out there to date

How To Get It

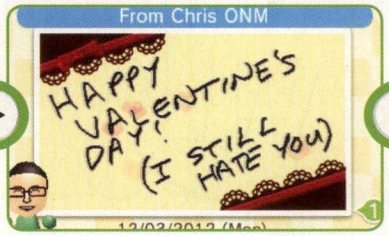
Score some exclusive stationery

Getting hold of the exclusive stationery is as easy as knowing someone who has it and getting them to send you a message with it. If they send you a message using the *Legend Of Zelda* stationery, for example, once you've read and closed the message, it'll automatically save to your collection. Still missing some? Maybe try asking around on the **ONM** forum or perhaps on the Facebook page to see who's willing to help you out.



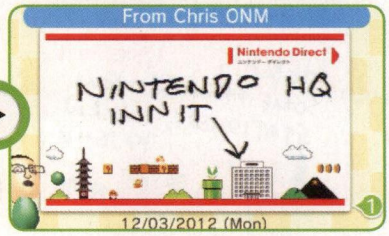
New Year Japan

This was sent to all Japanese Letter Box owners shortly after midnight on 1 January 2012, wishing them a Happy New Year from Nikki. How nice of her.



Valentine's Day

Sent to all Letter Boxers on 14 February 2012, this stationery features a Happy Valentine's Day message from Nikki and suggests you send it on to your valentine.

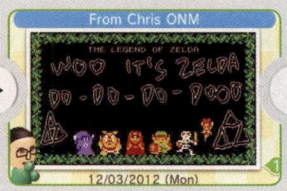


Nintendo Direct Japan

Nintendo held an online presentation called Nintendo Direct in February. This stationery was sent to Japanese gamers on 21 February to tell them about it.

Nintendo Direct USA

American gamers also got new stationery on 21 February (from Reggie Fils-Aimes this time) telling them about Nintendo Direct.

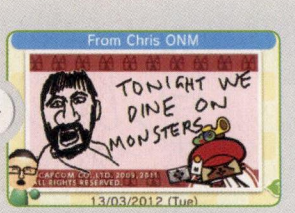


Zelda Anniversary

Anyone who bought Ocarina Of Time 3D received this Zelda themed stationery from Eiji Aonuma himself on 22 February thanking them.

GameCenter CX

Japanese Letter Box owners received this when a series of gameshow, GameCenter CX, was dedicated to 3DS Virtual Console games.



Monster Hunter

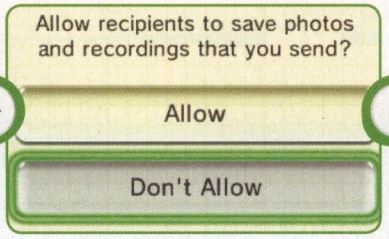
As with the Zelda stationery, Japanese gamers who had bought Monster Hunter Tri G on 3DS got this special stationery thanking them.

6 Boxing Clever

Some other general tips and tricks to get the most out of Letter Box

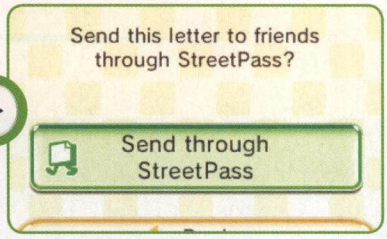
Pictures Of You

Like that 3D photo of your friend's dog? Fancy saving it? Tap the green arrow on the bottom screen and choose Save Photo to copy it to your SD Card. It'll cost you 10 Play Coins the first time.



Pictures Of Me

You might not like the idea of people saving your photos or sound clips and drawing all over them, though. If not, go to the Settings and turn off the Saving Photos/Recordings option. Sorted.



Word On The Street

Let's say you're at school and there's no Wi-Fi connection, but you want to send a letter to a friend sitting near you (not during class time, mind). Send your message through StreetPass instead.

Don't Let Go

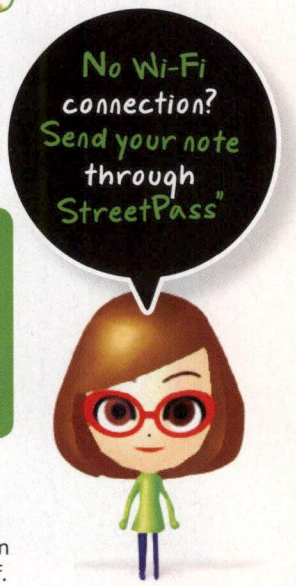
Letter Box has a limit of 3,000 messages, after which your first one will be deleted automatically. Tap the crown next to your favourites to protect them.

Net Gain

If you want to attach a photo, don't forget you can save images from the 3DS Internet Browser as well. Hold the stylus down on a pic to save it to your SD card.

Hey Nikki

If you're a fan of Nikki, you might be interested to know Nintendo released her official Mii recently. Scan this code in your 3DS Mii Maker to get it for yourself.



Win! Win! Win!

Every month we display the best of the ONM forumites' mock covers in the Gallery pages of the magazine (that's page number 22 this month, continuity fans). This time, we've decided it's time for you to step up to the plate and do it for real. You've probably noticed that this month's cover (once you peel off the sticky note) is a blank canvas, waiting for you to draw your own cover image on it. To make things more interesting, we're giving away a special prize to the best cover we see. All you have to do is draw your dream **ONM** cover on the front of this very issue (be sure to draw it right on the cover so we know it's your own work – no cheating by sticking paper on it!). Once you've created your magazine masterpiece, we want you to take a photo of it and email the photo to us at onm@futurenet.com with the subject heading "Letter Box Cover Compo". What's in it for you? Glad you asked. The one lucky person whose cover tickles us the most will win this little lot (deep breath) – copies of *Kid Icarus Uprising*, *Mario Kart 7*, *Super Mario 3D Land*, *Star Fox 64 3D*, *Pilotwings Resort* and *Nintendogs + Cats (Poodle Edition)*. And, as if that wasn't enough, you'll also get £50 of eShop credit so you can enjoy a big healthy chunk of Nintendo's other downloadable delights. Don't worry if you're not a great drawer, that's not important. We're judging on creativity and what makes us smile, rather than checking you drew the right number of bristles in Link's eyebrows. The closing date is 3 May and though only one person will win, we'll print a selection of our favourites in issue 83 so you might still get some fame. **Get covering!**

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"The fertile ground of the eShop is giving rise to new characters and even new genres"

DO WE NEED ANOTHER HERO?

How eShop heroes could be Nintendo's next stars

Nintendo is home to some excellent creation myths, both real and fictional. Every Nintendo character has several: Mario was originally the mascot for the Japanese equivalent of penny chews. Samus was modelled after an interestingly shaped cloud that floated into Nintendo's design headquarters. Yoshi came to Miyamoto in a fever dream after he'd accepted a challenge from Iwata to eat a large Dominos pizza in under 10 minutes. You've probably heard them all.

In this creatively conservative new era, though, new Nintendo characters seem fewer and farther between than ever. Who can recall the last new, original Nintendo creation – Miyamoto's Pikmin and their shepherd Captain Olimar, perhaps? As a studio, for better or worse, Nintendo rely on a well-defined cast, a recognisable lineup of much loved characters who, when not starring in their own games, make up the rosters of multiplayer crossover-fests Mario Kart and Super Smash Bros..

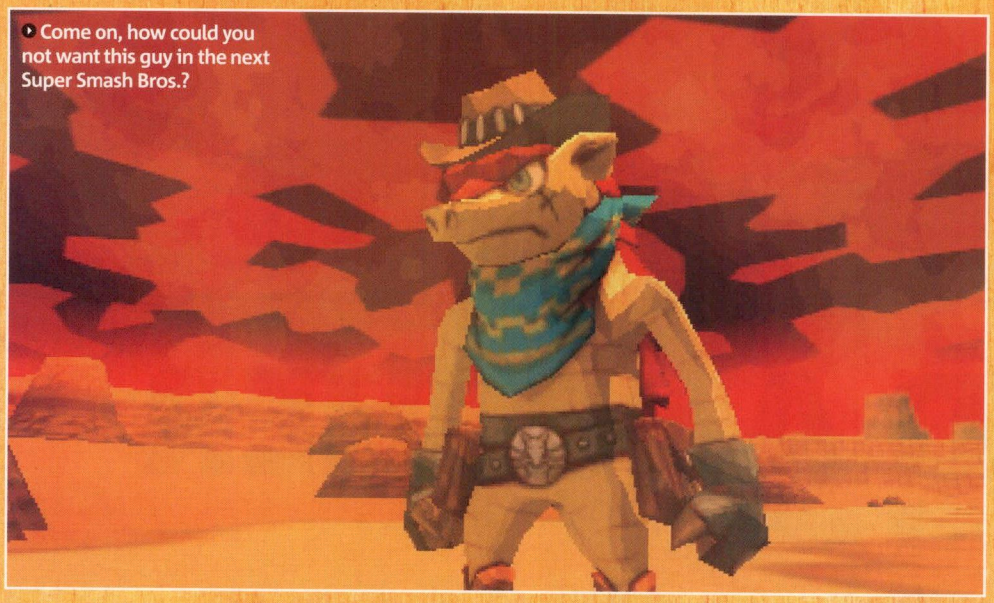
They are tried and tested mascots, guaranteed to catch the attention of millions of fans. It's the reason Mario has shown up in countless spin-offs, why we had *Mario's Picross* instead of plain old *Picross* and why *Link's Crossbow Training* even existed – slap a familiar face on an unfamiliar game and the whole thing becomes a more welcoming prospect. Don't blame Nintendo, blame a hyper-competitive games market and your silly human brain and its predilection for patterns and routine.

Heli-cycle piloting squirrel Russ acts as Dillon's spotter in the field. If you really want to push the Zelda analogy, he is to Dillon what Navi was to Link.

Question Of Character

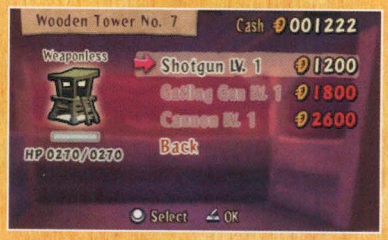
So where does that leave our chances of ever seeing new characters? Well, on the Nintendo eShop, it would seem, where ideas can be developed quickly and released inexpensively and at considerably smaller risk than would endanger a full-priced retail release. Nintendo's online storefront just might be the future birthplace of the next Mario or Link, and with the upcoming Wii U and Nintendo Network promising an even greater focus on downloadable titles, we could be on the cusp of a new wave of Nintendo innovation.

This might sound crazy, but we're already seeing the fertile ground of the eShop giving rise to new characters and even new genres. *Dillon's Rolling Western* is a prime example of this sort of innovation in action. Developed by independent Japanese developer



Come on, how could you not want this guy in the next Super Smash Bros.?

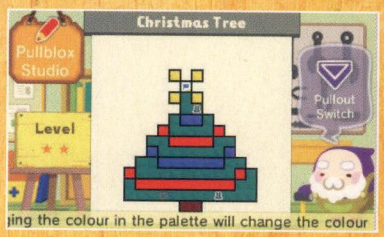
This red grock must be defeated quickly, otherwise he'll sprint towards town.



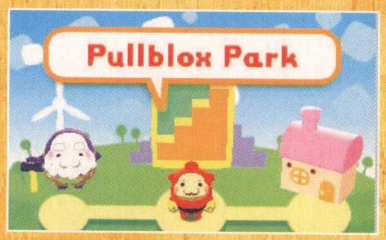
Towers must first be constructed before outfitting them with weaponry.

Grocks are menacing, relentless, unfeeling chunks of cold stone.

As you play you'll unlock better skills and abilities.



Pullblox allows players to design their own puzzles using an in-built editor.



With a cheerful artstyle and buckets of character, *Pullblox* was an instant favourite.

Vanpool, best known for its work on the Tingle series of DS games, as well as its quiet contributions to *Wii Play: Motion* and *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga*, *Dillon's Rolling Western* stars the eponymous armadillo, who is devoted to protecting the towns of the Wild West from the persistent attacks of an army of sentient, perambulatory rock people.

Dillon travels from town to town, using his limited time during the day to mine for resources and build up the town's defences through constructing watchtowers that render enemy Grocks visible on the lower screen's map and three kinds of gun turrets, which damage the Grocks as they attempt to make their way to the town gates.

Once the sun sets, the Grocks spawn from their nests and head for the town along preset paths. Over three in-game days the Grock army increases in number and variety, requiring Dillon to battle with any that slip through your increasingly busy network of turrets.

"Who wouldn't argue for Dillon's inclusion in the next Super Smash Bros. game?"

Pullblox's Mallo is a sort of, erm, gerbil thing? We're not sure.

It's a tower defence game, then, but one that's most stylistically similar to *Spirit Tracks* on DS. Dillon's a silent protagonist and heads up an all-animal cast of weird cowboys, strange ranchers, grumpy saloon bartenders and fashion-obsessed, southern belles.

His disparate grunts, however, are rumoured to have been provided by Link's own voice actor, his health appears in hearts and can be bolstered by finding heart pieces, incidental jingles play as doors are unlocked, the camera pans around Dillon as he opens chests; there are more than a few nods to Nintendo's green-hatted adventurer to be found.

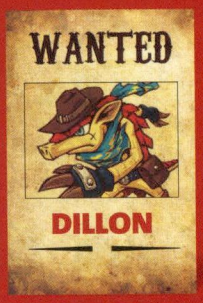
Roll With It

Roaming the countryside in search of mines and treasures is achieved by drawing back the stylus on the touchscreen and letting go, causing Dillon to roll into a ball and careen wildly across the grassy plains, kicking up clumps of three-dee dirt as he takes sharp corners.

The world itself is as bright and as colourful as toon Hyrule. It could even, with some stretch of the imagination, fit

Nintendo's Future Stars

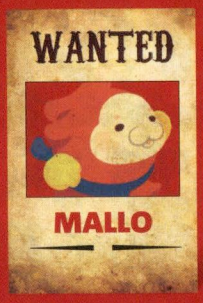
Which of these eShop heroes might debut in the next Super Smash Bros.?



Dillon

• Odds 5-1

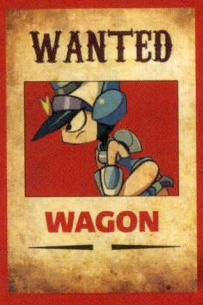
Vanpool's armadillo is with a good chance of making the list. He comes with a bunch of moves already built in, such as his armoured shell grind attack and, as a Nintendo-published character, he's got good old nepotism on his side, to boot.



Mallo

• Odds 40-1

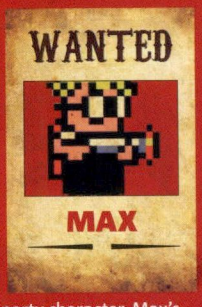
Another Nintendo-owned character, Mallo is somewhat lacking in personality. The *Pullblox* star himself might not be an effective fighter, but a *Pullblox*-themed level in which platforms could be pushed in and out would be truly excellent.



Patricia Wagon

• Odds 400-1

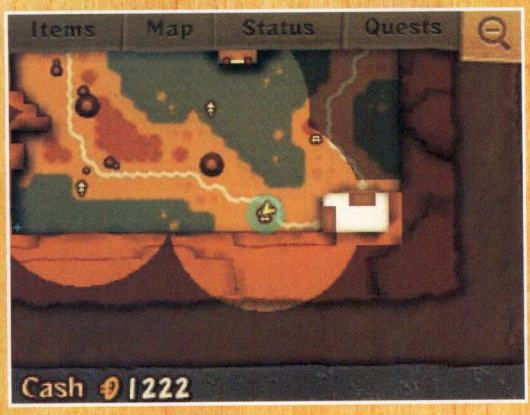
The cybernetic cop is the first in this list that doesn't belong to Nintendo (not that this kept Kojima's Solid Snake and Sega's Sonic out of the last game), but her block-switching abilities would fit into Nintendo's brawler.



Max

• Odds 500-1

Another third-party character, Max's water gun would certainly make a great addition to the Super Smash Bros. arsenal. His useful ability to jump both into and out of the screen would lend itself to some clever strategies, too.



The bottom screen shows the map. Useful for keeping track of Grocks.

Mayors come in all shapes, sizes and intelligences.

into the Zelda universe. Dillon's squirrel sidekick, Russ, acts as a spotter and interpreter for the too-cool-to-chat hero, advising him on his duties for the day and, over the course of the game, revealing more about the pair's respective pasts and their motivations.

There's a lot of texture and character here, especially considering it's an action strategy game – typically the most charm-free and po-faced of the genres. Our review can be found on page 105 of this very issue. We loved it, having fallen for what has unexpectedly turned out to be one of the eShop's greatest games yet.

So Vanpool has clearly taken the time and effort to create a hero who could stand side by side with Nintendo's finest. Whether or not Dillon wins over the hearts of gamers is another matter entirely however, and until Nintendo starts coughing up sales figures for eShop games, we'll never know if the Grock-smashing armadillo is gaining any traction. But browsing the lineup of *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*, which includes such forgettables as StarFox's Wolf, who wouldn't argue for Dillon's inclusion in the next Smash Bros. game?

He's already got the moves, so if our knowledge of games development serves us, it's simply a matter of dragging and dropping him from one game into the other. Probably.

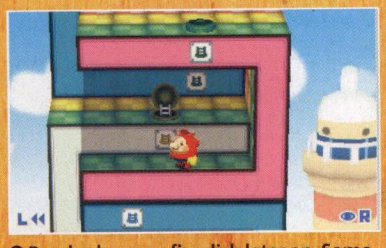
Wii Can Be Heroes

And why stop there? Another character conceived and born on the eShop is *Pullblox*'s Mallo, the block-tugging tubster who stars in what most agree is the eShop's killer app. A clever, charming, colourful and challenging puzzle game, *Pullblox* has you pushing and pulling segments of a wall to create a path to the top of the structure – a bit like a tiny person trying to climb a huge, complicated chest of drawers.

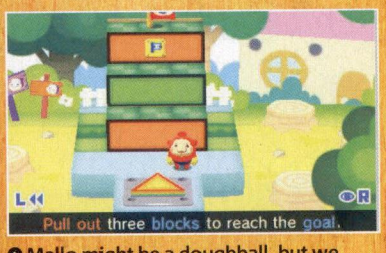
With hundreds of these puzzles built in, and the ability to create and share puzzles using QR codes, *Pullblox* offers endless replay value.

While Mallo's arguably lacking in Dillon's shining personality, there's just no denying that he's a character of whom many have grown fond. In fact, we're sure many players can sympathise with his confused expression, joyful waddle and pathetic jumping ability. Whack him in the next Super Smash Bros. and Nintendo would show its commitment to a platform that's actively creating and fostering new ideas and new characters.

The eShop is more than just a storefront, it's a developer playground, a test bed and a melting pot. It's an opportunity for Nintendo to take risks on new intellectual properties, original characters and uncharted genres. It's a place where recognisable brands take a back seat to newcomers. Whether or not it makes a star of Dillon himself, we reckon the eShop is where the next Nintendo icon will be born. +



Puzzles become fiendish later on. Some of them will have you stumped for days.



Mallo might be a doughball, but we reckon he could hold his own in a fight.

Old man Papa Blox is much older and wiser than young Mallo.

Nintendo at the BAFTAs

Once again, the Academy embarrasses itself by failing to reward excellence in the category of Best Bearded Welsh Video Producer

Up at Nintendo TV HQ, we spend an inordinate amount of time arguing with each other over whether or not games are 'art' and this month in Nintendo TV I witnessed the best possible argument in favour at the video game BAFTA awards. The cream of the video game developing crop were all present at the awards to see who would walk away with those famous gold face statues you see Colin Firth strolling around with.

Nintendo was nominated in a load of categories, including Best Handheld and Best Innovation. There's *still* no award for Best Bearded Welsh Video Producer, though. There's only one place to see all the big winners from the night in 3D and that's in Episode 5 of Nintendo TV.

Nintendo has not been kind to my already sparse social life in the past months, releasing not one, or two but three massive Japanese RPGs. The latest of these, *Pandora's Tower*, has already swallowed a considerable amount of my mind. If you're wondering whether or not to pick up this beast of a game, check out Episode 5 to find out everything you need to know about it.

Remember, you can watch every episode of Nintendo TV for free just by visiting our section of the Nintendo eShop. And If you don't have a Nintendo 3DS, you can still watch Nintendo TV in 2D on your Wii's Nintendo Channel and ONM's YouTube channel two weeks after the 3D release. ✚

Gavin Murphy
Video Producer

> "Pandora's Tower has swallowed a considerable amount of my mind"

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New episode
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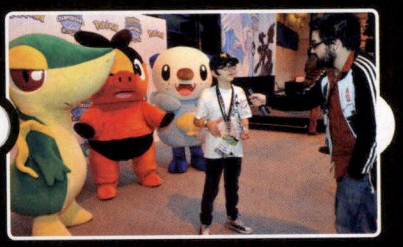
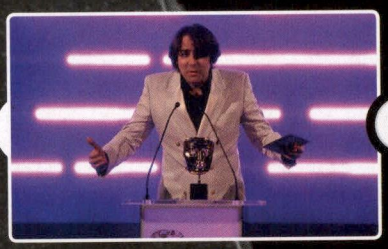
The latest from the UK Video Game Championships, some celebrity-pestering and the last word on Pandora's Tower

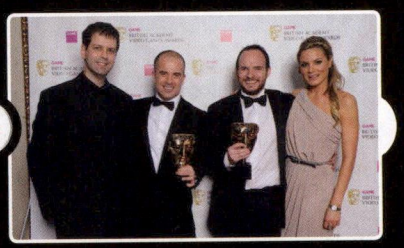


"Episode Four almost became the Punch-Out!! tribute show"

Episode Four
Available now

The fourth episode was touch and go for a while, the reason being *Punch-Out!!* I spent more time playing this and Episode 4 almost became the *Punch-Out!! Tribute Show*, but some stern words from on high forced me to chuck in some stuff about the UK Pokémon Video Game Championships. Take a gander to experience the ecstatic highs and crippling lows of the UK VGCs, which saw more than 600 Pokémon trainers battle it out for a trip to the World Championships in Hawaii.





Episode Five
Available in April

The next episode will be coming at you with a collection of celebrities that'll make the Royal Wedding look like a night out at Chicken Cottage. I did a bit of stalking and restraining-order violating on the red carpet at this year's video game BAFTA awards to find out just how much these 'Celebrity Gamers' knew about games. The results were surprising, controversial and definitely worth seeing. I've also blown apart *Pandora's Tower* to dissect the JRPG to within an inch of its life.

Get NTV now!

Step 1
First make sure your 3DS is online. You can connect to your home Wi-Fi in the Settings menu.

Step 2
In the 3DS main menu, select the Nintendo eShop. If you can't see it, you'll first need to update your 3DS.

Step 3
Browse the eShop until you spot the Nintendo TV category. Select it. Select it as hard as you can.

Step 4
Choose the latest episode and enjoy! Don't worry if you miss one, we'll keep the old episodes available, too.

Don't forget to check us out on Twitter and Facebook:

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How can Nintendo convince indie developers to make games for Wii U?

THE WAR FOR I

At E3 last year, we saw famous developers scrambling to say how much they wanted to create games for the Wii U. All the big guns were pulled out: the head of EA praised it; Codemasters, THQ and Sega all confirmed their franchises were coming to it; Ken Levine, of *Bioshock* fame, eulogised it, calling its secondary screen "a really revolutionary thing"; Warner Bros revealed *Lego City Stories* for it and GDC Lifetime Achievement award-winner Warren Spector predicted that developers would soon be making the sort of games that have been impossible to realise until now.

Similarly, the conference chambers at E3 and GamesCom in 2011 were full of developers talking about the device, the potential for the exciting new high-def-capable hardware and the unique, half-tablet controller.

Some were more cautious, though – *Doom* and *Quake* creator, id, was particularly hesitant, stating that it was dubious about there being an audience for their shooty bang-bang games on it – but it was certainly a focus of attention.

However, as Oscar Wilde said, "There is only one thing in life worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about." At GDC this year, the conference chamber was excited, but not about Wii U. "I didn't hear any Wii U buzz," Nicholas Lovell, director of games consultancy, Gamesbrief, told **ONM**. "Literally, none."

The chatter was about moving games into healthcare, into education and about how the industry should stand up for games as being valuable in themselves. Even the potential of the new Apple iPad 3 was only a scarce undercurrent; the biggest story was about how many luminaries of the industry were looking hungrily at the independent games market and thinking about going it alone.

Independent Thought

This wasn't because developers don't want to make games for the Wii U – we didn't find a developer who didn't love Nintendo – but because the industry is changing so quickly. Industry legend Tim Schafer's Double Fine studio is a symbol of this independent trend. The company was on the verge of collapse when working as a contractor on *Brütal Legend* for EA, not having enough money to pay its staff. Making a virtue of necessity, it took a fortnight to brainstorm dozens of small, downloadable games, then got to work on them, subsequently saving the company with unique, award-winning titles such as *Stacking* and *Costume Quest*. By cutting out the publishers and the distributors and focusing on the sort of games the studio wanted to make, it made games people wanted to play and sold them by the bucketload.

These small, popular indies are the developers Nintendo really needs to convince, because they break the mould and make games like *Angry Birds*, *Lost Winds* and *Cut The Rope*. If you're an indie developer with extremely limited resources, then the additional time and cost of developing for another platform becomes significant, unless your engine or the platform makes it easy.

Guy Somberg is the technical developer behind *Minion Master*, a combined card, figurine and video game coming out on multiple platforms. "In order for Nintendo to win over these

NDEPENDENTS

independent developers, it needs to do two things," he said. "First, make it cheap and easy to get development kits. And second, make the development environment easy and robust."

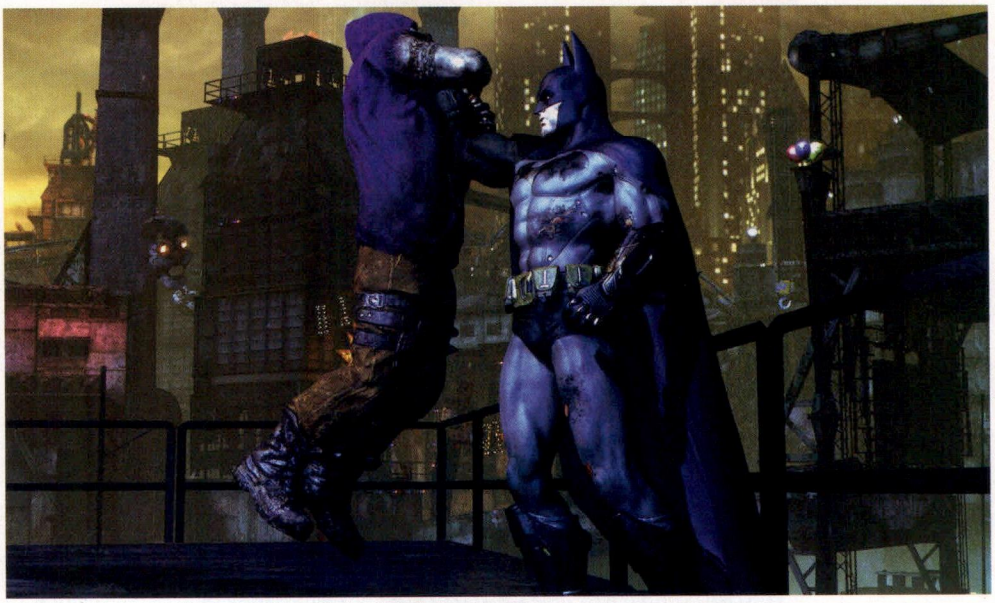
Nintendo has had problems distributing development kits before, but on the second point, that's where popular programs like Epic's Unreal Engine and Unity come in.

These are cheap, multi-platform development tools that make very good looking games and hold independent developers' hands when exporting their games to new platforms.

Start Your Engines

Though Unity hasn't declared whether or not it will support Wii U, at GDC Epic announced that Unreal Engine 3 would, which is a huge step for independent developers. Epic vice-president, Mark Rein, said, "I think the E3 will be a big eye-opener for people. I played *Batman: Arkham City* on the Wii U and some cool stuff had been done with the controller."

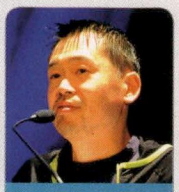
Having the biggest development platforms on board means developing



Batman: Arkham City is currently released on other consoles and runs on a modified version of Unreal Engine 3 technology, which is owned by Epic Games. Epic recently offered their development tools up for free for non-commercial developers – and those who wanted to sell their games need only buy a $99 license. Cheap, powerful and easy to develop for, the Unreal Engine has become a mainstay of independent development. The technology continues to be used by thousands of game designers who would otherwise have to spend time and money putting together their own graphics engine from scratch.

Games Industry Is "Frog In Well"

Keiji Inafune slams Japanese game development at GDC



Keiji Inafune
Mega Man creator

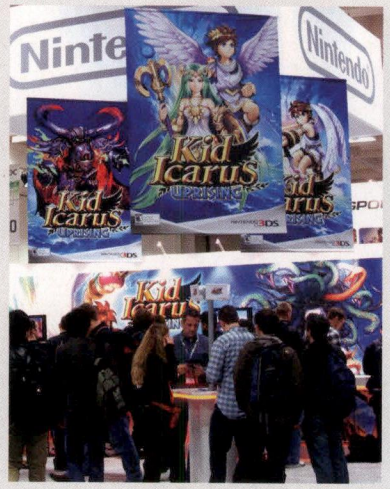
The challenges for the Wii U aren't just from the hardware or the market: the real problem is local Japanese developers who are stagnant and obsessed with nostalgia, or so says, Kejii Inafune, co-creator of and major creative mover behind the seminal title, *Mega Man*. Having quit Capcom to launch his own studio, his GDC talk laid into Japanese game development, saying the major developers were no longer hungry enough and were resting on their laurels.

"To win, you must first acknowledge your loss and start over. The Japanese games industry has become a frog in a well." Inafune went on to claim that he believes Japanese developers hadn't tried to develop games with a global audience in mind, as Capcom had attempted to do during his tenure at the company.

Nowadays, though, he feels embarrassed to travel overseas because he feels that Japanese games are in danger of becoming little more than a "blast from the past".

Inafune's comments were echoed less subtly by Phil Fish, winner of the Independent Games Federation's grand prize this year for *Fez*, who told an audience of developers that Japanese games "just suck".

You don't have to look very far to find heaps of evidence to the contrary, though it's hard to deny that the industry's big money-spinners are defiantly Western (think *Call of Duty*).



The Game Developers Conference in San Francisco is a week long series of events, from a games expo to developer talks and presentations. GDC also plays host to the Independent Games Festival as well as the Game Developers Choice Awards. It's professional, rather than consumer-focused. So you won't see any Mario costumes. Okay, maybe just a few.

A New Hope

Will Nintendo's games carry the Wii U?

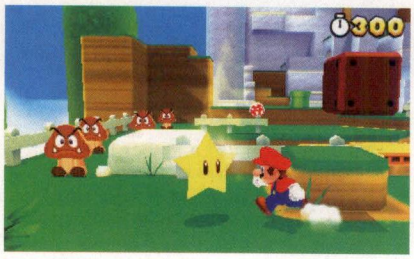
As if to provide a ray of sunshine after Inafune's despair, GDC's best talk was from the director of *Super Mario 3D Land* and *Super Mario Galaxy 2*, Koichi Hayashida. He described the design process for *Super Mario 3D Land*, giving an inspiring glimpse into the inner workings of Nintendo's collective dev-brain and an enticing snapshot of the kinds of ideas that never leave the drawing board.

"We always consider ideas outside the normal range of what people expect for a Mario game," explained Hayashida, before showing off the cancelled concepts the team had for Huge Mario (where only his feet appeared on the screen), Long Mario (gangly and disturbingly spidery), Pro Skater Mario and Princess Peach (where you could change and swap faces with your friend's).

"We want to make others laugh with our strange new ideas; I want to make something fun, rather than something new," he said. With that in mind, Miyamoto persuaded the team to look at 3D optical illusions, which accounts for the many Escher-style puzzles in the final game.

He also talked about the effects of the 2011 Tokyo earthquake on game development, how the studio shut for a week, how they worried about radiation and the many aftershocks and how difficult it was to motivate themselves to work when they felt they should be helping outside. But then Hayashida realised, "As game developers, our work is special. All of us here can put smiles on very many people's faces."

This was how they could help – by making *Super Mario 3D Land* and getting Japan to smile again. With inspirational and touching people in charge like Miyamoto and Hayashida, Nintendo's games for the Wii U can't fail to be brilliant.



***Super Mario 3D Land* is a 3DS best-seller. Perhaps Nintendo don't even need independent developers?**

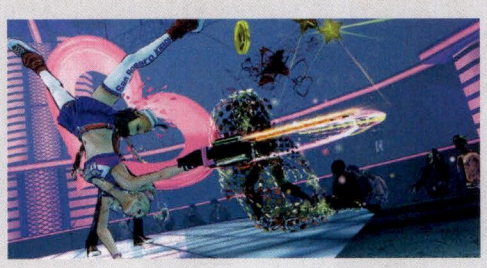
for Wii U alongside its older competitors is almost as easy as flipping a switch.

Victor Magnuson, a developer on EA's *Battlefield Play4Free*, who's working on his own *Diablo*-style download game, *Krater*, was very excited about the controller. "The addition of the second screen could have great gameplay potential, mixing all the fun and exciting things that have been emerging on the handheld market with a more traditional gaming experience," he enthused.

Somberg agreed: "We're particularly excited about it in the context of *Minion Master* multiplayer games, where we can show the game board on the primary television, while showing each player's hand on their personal controller."

Indeed, the developer who was most excited was Joel Bylos of Funcom. "Wii U could be the first real console on which running an MMORPG without compromise is plausible," he said. "The controller is perfect for lining up those rows of hotbars that are essential in most MMOs. A customisable touchscreen interface combined with the 3D spatial movement of a console controller could be a winner."

We asked Suda 51, developer of *Killer 7* and *No More Heroes*, if he'd bring his



Funcom reckon *The Secret World* (above) is an example of an MMORPG that would work on Wii U. Meanwhile, *Brütal Legend* (near left) was developer Double Fine's last commercially published game before they sought to go it alone and self-publish online. Freeing themselves of corporate shackles allowed them to flex their creative muscle. The Wii U's Nintendo Network is ready to support their games.

new game, *Lollipop Chainsaw*, to Wii U. "When I created it in HD, I didn't have the opportunity, but, possibly with the help of Warner Brothers, I would hope to do so," he told us. "It's a possibility and it's the developers who really have the power to do it, but in collaboration with other people." So, yes, if someone else pays for it, in other words.

On The Down Side

Despite their avowed love of Nintendo, several developers we talked to weren't ready to commit to the platform just yet. Mark Rein is a case in point. Like id, Epic's audience is more "hardcore" and, despite bringing the Unreal Engine 3 to Wii U, even Rein didn't seem ready to commit to developing a game for Wii U.

"If I had ten development teams I'd make a game for every single platform," he said. "But we don't, so it's a matter of picking and choosing what we do."

Why would these developers shy away from developing for the Wii U, if it's so easy? John Warren from Minicore – a typical indie start-up working on its first game, *Laika Believes* – considered the Wii a "failure in terms of delivering fantastic gaming experiences". "When my fondest memories of a console include a handful of proprietary games, but a larger set of ports and nostalgia pieces, that's a problem," he opined. "Nintendo needs to convince me that developing for the Wii U is worth the time and money."

Not all developers agree with Warren's damning verdict on the Wii, but some do have concerns about Nintendo's use of online, as Matt Higby of Sony Online Entertainment and *Planetside 2* explained. "Nintendo has an incredible talent for bring hardware and software together to create unprecedented, magical gaming experiences. The only hurdle left is taking online seriously: Sony and Microsoft are light years ahead and a major draw for the core games that are bread and butter for third-parties."

Warren's criticism does point to another issue – there weren't many huge successes on the Wii that Nintendo didn't make themselves. "Nintendo has to persuade developers that there is money to be made while explaining how it will use digital technology to drive significant additional revenue." saidLovell.

Frederick Wester, CEO of Swedish PC publisher, Paradox, agreed. "HD or no HD, Nintendo has been unable to show really good numbers for other publishers. It needs to support third-party developers more with marketing to show that their games can sell on the Nintendo platform.

"Hopefully, Nintendo will demonstrate at E3 how it has changed the store from the Wii and how it is going to get us to buy more games online, which will allay this fear," he concluded.

Brave New World

So the Wii U is likely to emerge into a challenging world, much changed from when it was conceived and announced. The support from Epic is a huge boost. If Nintendo can convince indie developers that they'll make money on the downloads market, is generous with development kits, and gives marketing support like they've done with eShop, they'll flock to it in droves, especially as it's unlikely to be opposed by any other consoles for at least a year.

Add in the always-brilliant first-party games from developers like Hayashida (see 'A New Hope', left) and the fact that the big publishers like EA, Activision and Ubisoft will always put all of their games on it, and there's every chance the Wii U will storm the gaming world. ✚

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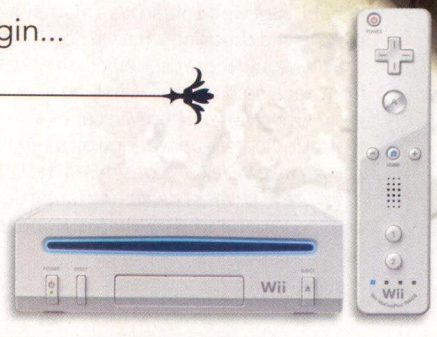

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THE BEAT GOES ON

A POTTED HISTORY OF THE RHYTHM ACTION GENRE

Nintendo released the Power Pad in 1986. This plastic mat had 12 pressure sensors on it and enabled players to play games using their feet. While most of the dozen games released for the Power Pad were fitness and athletic games, one title – Bandai's *Dance Aerobics* – had players standing on certain spots on the map to the beat of the music. Bandai had unwittingly created the first ever rhythm action game. Oddly (or perhaps not, given that the Power Pad was widely ignored), *Dance Aerobics* came and went without any fuss and the rhythm genre would lie dormant for another decade.

Masaya Matsuura was the man to bring it out of the doldrums. A musician who composed music for the popular Japanese synth band, PSY-S, when the group eventually broke up he formed a development studio called NanaOn-Sha and started work on a game that used music as its main focus. Working with New York artist Rodney Greenblat Matsuura created *PaRappa The Rapper*, a game starring a paper-thin dog who the player had to help rap to the beat of the music. *PaRappa The Rapper* was released on the PlayStation in 1996 and became a huge success, spawning a sequel and a spin-off, *UmJammer Lammy*, in which players strummed a guitar.

MUSIC MANIA

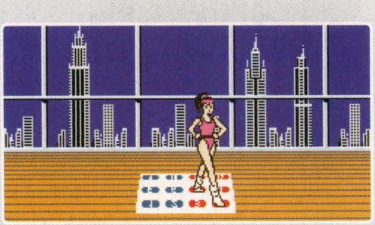
Elsewhere, Konami was taking note. Spurred on by the success of *PaRappa*, it decided that rhythm action games were the way forward and over the next couple of years it released a slew of games that built on *PaRappa*'s original idea to evolve and define the rhythm genre further, starting with *Beatmania*.

Originally a 1997 arcade release, it was the first rhythm game in which players actually made music. Its special control system had five piano buttons and a DJ turntable, and players had to press the right button or scratch the turntable as falling icons passed a line at the bottom of the screen. The system proved popular and is used by most rhythm games to this day. Over the next 12 years an insane 101 versions of Beatmania (or Bemani) were

***Guitar Hero* was the fruit of the union of Harmonix and Red Octane. Its use of western songs made it an international smash.**

This Is The Rhythm Of My Life

A rundown of the most important rhythm games in the history of Nintendo gaming



Dance Aerobics

● **NES,** 1986

Arguably the first ever rhythm action game, this game used the ill-fated Nintendo Power Pad mat and had players stepping on it to the beat of the (awful) 8-bit music. Like the Power Pad, it was quickly forgotten about.

Beatmania GB

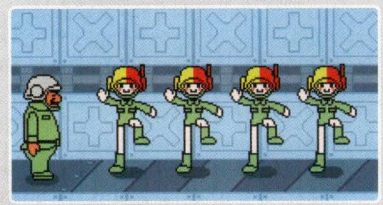
● **Game Boy Color,** 1999

Over 100 Bemani games – a range of music titles from Konami – were released in the series' lifespan but only three ended up on Nintendo systems. The Beatmania GB games offered early beat-matching to chiptunes.

Donkey Konga

● **GameCube,** 2003

Nintendo teamed up with Namco to create a fun rhythm game that came with a big set of plastic bongos. Players had to either slap the bongos or clap their hands to the beat of music, which was enjoyably cheesy.



Rhythm Tengoku

● **Game Boy Adavance,** 2006

This was a collaboration between Nintendo and Japanese musician, Tsunku, and featured a bunch of mad mini-games played to the beat. Though it was never released outside of Japan, its DS sequel *Rhythm Paradise* was.

Guitar Hero III

● **Wii,** 2007

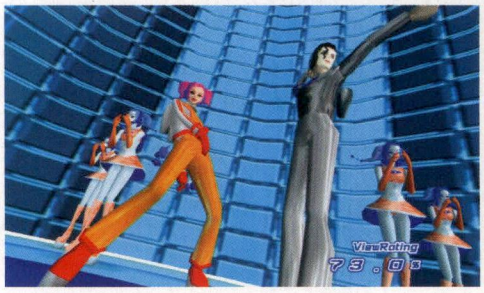
The first of the Guitar Hero series to arrive on a Nintendo system and probably the high point in the series' history. Its bonus track, *Through The Fire And The Flames*, became a badge of honour among gamers.

Samba De Amigo

● **Wii,** 2008

The Dreamcast original came with maraca controllers, so a Wii remake made sense. The accuracy was a little off, but the track listing, the absurd gameplay and the fact you were controlling a smiling monkey made it fun.

DJ Hero's tracklisting, including DJ Shadow and Grandmaster Flash, ensured instant legendary status.



Sega's *Space Channel 5* offered plenty of oddness, including a cameo by Michael Jackson in the sequel.

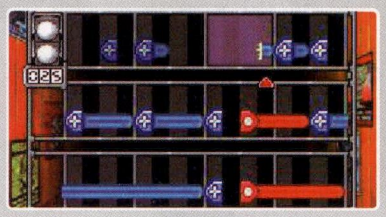
The toe-tapping *Rhythm Thief* will be delighting musically inclined Nintendo fans this month.

released in Asia (including three on the Game Boy), offering thousands of songs all with the same 'five keys and a turntable' system. It was Konami's Bemani spin-offs that would prove more influential outside of Japan, however.

Under the Benami name, Konami released three pivotal rhythm games in the late '90s: *Dance Dance Revolution*, *Guitar Freaks* and *Drum Mania*. *Dance Dance Revolution* was obviously the most successful of the three for Konami – it single-handedly created the dance game craze that still has 15-year-olds jumping up and down in every bowling alley and arcade in the world. And yet it was *Guitar Freaks* and *Drum Mania* that would go on to have a greater influence on the genre.

KEEP ON STRUMMING

Both *Guitar Freaks* and *Drum Mania* followed the same *Beatmania* tradition of hitting notes as they passed a line, but real revolution was in the controllers – a guitar and drumkit respectively. Both games were only modestly successful in arcades: it would take a struggling developer called Harmonix Music Systems to truly fulfil the idea's potential. Teaming up with peripheral company Red Octane and Activision, Harmonix created *Guitar Hero* in 2005. Its use of songs that were more recognisable in the



Daigasso! Band Brothers

● **DS,** 2004

The DS launched in Japan with this brilliant, but difficult rhythm game. Up to eight players could choose their instruments and play the same song together. Its sequel was released in the UK as *Jam With The Band*.

Dancing Stage Mario Mix

● **GameCube,** 2005

The success of *Dance Dance Revolution* (*Dancing Stage* in the UK) prompted Konami to make a Mario version of the game for Nintendo. The music was a mix of Mario themes and dance versions of classical music.

Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan!

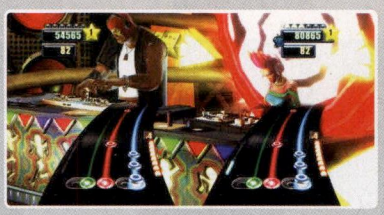
● **DS,** 2005

Cheerleading special agents use rhythm to save the day. The unique circle-tapping system in *Ouendan* (and its western sequel, *Elite Beat Agents*) influenced a bunch of imitators, but it will always remain the best.

Rock Band 2

● **Wii,** 2008

Though the original *Rock Band* made it onto the Wii, it was severely limited. The sequel was a fully fledged Rock Band game though, with oodles of downloadable songs and fantastic local and online multiplayer modes.



DJ Hero

● **Wii,** 2009

DJ Hero's turntable improved on *Beatmania*'s. Its tracklist offered 93 bespoke mash-ups by the likes of Daft Punk, Grandmaster Flash and DJ Shadow, making it arguably the greatest soundtrack in rhythm game history.

Just Dance

● **Wii,** 2009

While not to everyone's taste, Ubisoft's Just Dance games have a huge following that's keeping the rhythm genre alive among gamers that care less about high scores and more about just having fun with friends.

west made it a huge success in the US and Europe, and when MTV later bought Harmonix it created the Rock Band series, adding drums and vocals to the mix.

Both series would eventually lose steam and die out due to over-saturation – there were 15 Guitar Hero games in five years and 14 Rock Band games in four years – but they were easily the most important games in the rhythm genre.

While it's fair then to say that *PaRappa The Rapper* was the first true rhythm action game, Konami nailed down the gameplay system and Harmonix made the genre mainstream, it's also worth noting that countless other developers and publishers have all taken numerous (and presumably steadily rhythmic) bites of the rhythm action pie.

● ***Gitaroo Man*, released on the PlayStation, took the genre to new levels with this much-loved campfire serenade level.**

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

Sega tried its hand at the genre with *Samba De Amigo*, a Latin-flavoured game that came with two maracas that had to be shaken to the beat. Meanwhile Namco went down a similarly noisy route with its *Taiko: Drum Master* games. These huge arcade machines had a huge drum that players had to beat with big sticks. Both series would eventually find their way to Nintendo systems, with *Samba De Amigo* seeing a Wii remake and a the DS getting a couple of Taiko games in Japan.

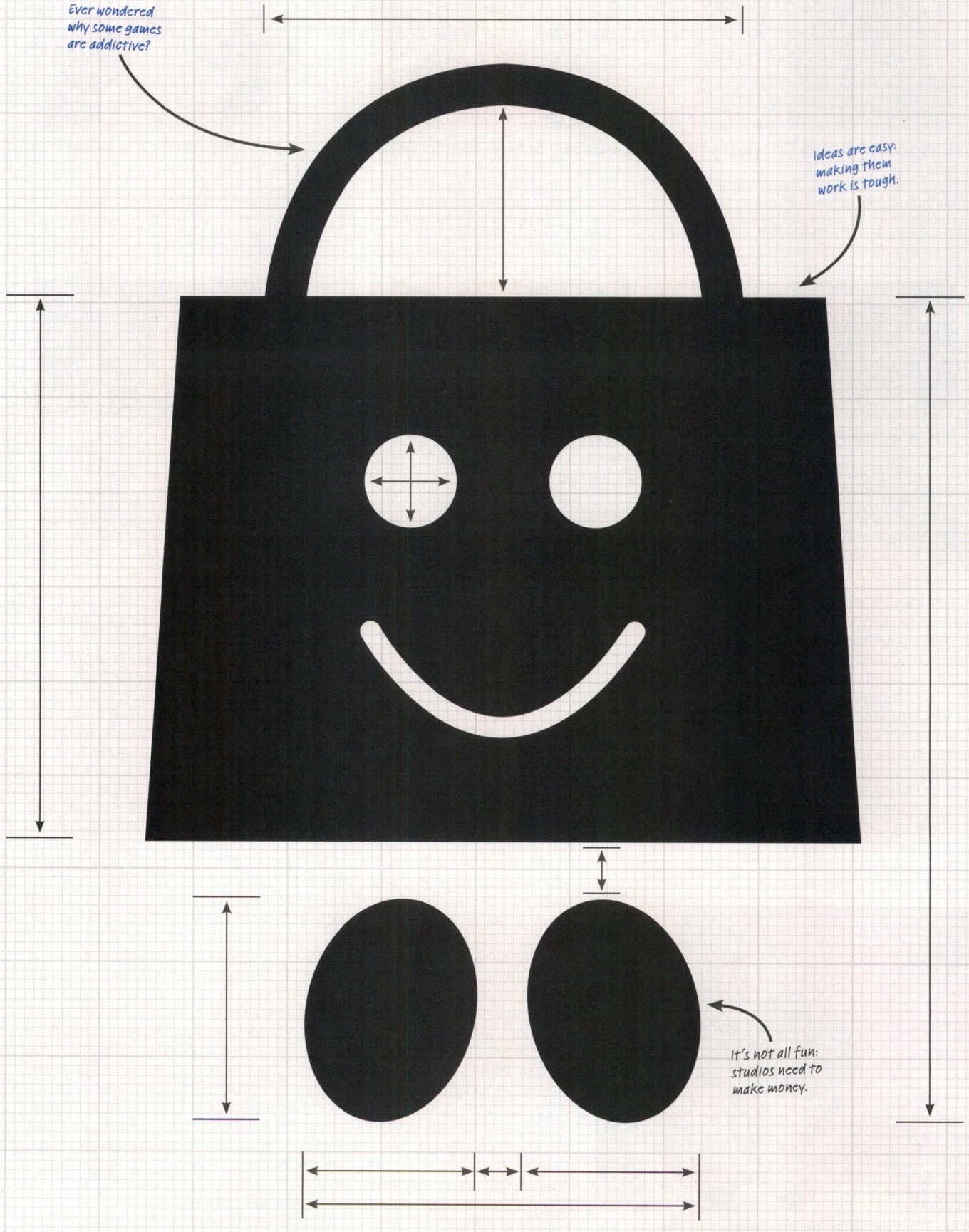
After his success with *PaRappa*, Masaya Matsuura also tried something new with the bizarre *Vib Ribbon*, a PlayStation rhythm game that read any music CDs you put in the system and generated unique levels for each track. For the record, The Prodigy's *Fat Of The Land* album was a nightmare to play through.

With rhythm games so popular in Japan, it's no surprise that Nintendo got involved in the genre too. Its first attempt at it was *Donkey Konga*, a collaboration between Nintendo and Namco for the GameCube that came with a special bongo controller. It was essentially a modified version of Namco's *Taiko: Drum Master* game, only instead of hitting a single drum with sticks, you were slapping bongos with your hands. Its success led to a couple of sequels.

Nintendo's other dabblings in rhythm games included *Elite Beat Agents* – a stylus-based game on DS, the success of which spawned a slew of imitators – and *Jam With The Band*, a very difficult DS music game where players could choose any instrument in a song and play it using a combination of the D-Pad, face and shoulder buttons and touchscreen.

Its most recent success in the west, however, is the Rhythm Paradise series. Initially a Japan-only game, *Rhythm Paradise* took the genre right back to the simplistic days of *PaRappa* for a game that delighted players with its catchy music and engrossing gameplay. These days the rhythm gaming fad has died down a little, what with Activision killing off the Guitar Hero games, the Rock Band series going on a (seemingly permanent) break and the slow, painful death of arcades making dance games increasingly rare.

That's not to say there isn't still a love for the genre, though. The Just Dance games sell in silly numbers on a regular basis and with the likes of *Beat The Beat: Rhythm Paradise*, *Theatrhythm Final Fantasy* and the wonderful *Rhythm Thief* all on the way this year, the beat will continue to go on in this cult genre for the foreseeable future. ✚


Ever wondered why some games are addictive?
Ideas are easy: making them work is tough.
It's not all fun: studios need to make money.

Get it right and your game can strike gold on the eShop.

HOW TO MAKE AN ESHOP GAME

Three developers reveal the inside story on their new games, from concept to completion

Art and science both come into play in videogame development. Look beyond simple aesthetics and into the raw components of any game and you'll find complex machinery at work, nudging you towards the next checkpoint or daring you to take a little extra risk for a little extra reward. Game concepts are the easy part, says our gang of eShop developers: get past that initial stage and the real work begins.

Keith Co is the brains behind *Amoebattle*, a forthcoming eShop game from Intrinsic Games. "A game idea could fly through your head at any moment," he tells **ONM**. "It could be inspired by art or movies, or be based on a life experience. You could take a game or genre you liked and then look for ways to improve upon it.

"Whenever I get an idea, I immediately write it down and keep it somewhere. It might be terrible, but a game designer usually has a bunch of concepts just filed away and a great game could be born from one or a combination of these random ideas. *Amoebattle* was inspired by an educational game I played as a kid involving amoebas."

Manfred Linzner is bossman at Shin'en Multimedia, creator of *FAST Racing League*, *Jett Rocket* and the extremely enthusiastically named *Fun! Fun! Minigolf Touch!* "We talk everyday about new ideas and concepts," he says.

"They are then floating until they get tested or abandoned. Often we find inspiration from things that have nothing to do with games."

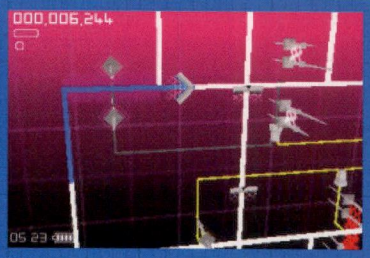
Quality Control

How do you sift through all these disparate ideas, though? From here it's a process of identifying the strongest ideas and trialling them from there. "When deciding what the next project would be, each person was allowed to bring forth any number of ideas for consideration,"

Intrinsic Games' *Amoebattle* was almost scrapped in development.

Intrinsic Games

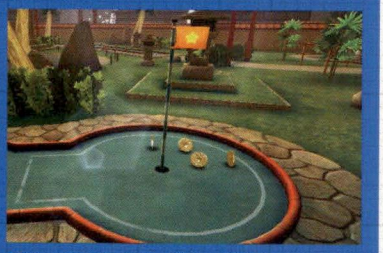
A five-man team based in California, most of the Intrinsic Games team are alumni of the University of Southern California. President Hersh Choksi tells us more: "We started Intrinsic Games with a focus on creating really unique handheld games. Our first title, *Divergent Shift*, formerly known as *Reflection*, was our university project that was then published by Konami. We've since been developing two more titles, *Penguin Patrol* and *Amoebattle*."



EscapeVektor is a result of Nnooo's commitment to unique visual styles.

Nnooo

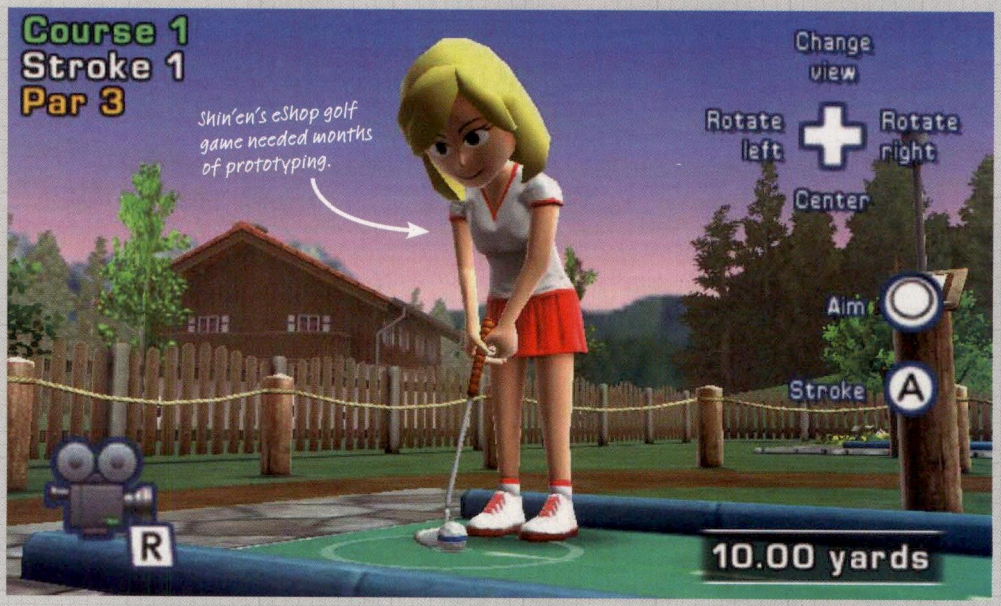
"Nnooo is a self-funded and self-published indie developer based in Sydney, Australia," says the company's creative director, Nic Watt. "We are probably most famous for *Pop* (a WiiWare launch title), our myLifeCollected series (which includes *myNotebook*, *myPostcards* and *myDiary*) as well as *escapeVektor* and *Spirit Hunters Inc*. Our company has a lot of experience with developing for Nintendo hardware now and we love it!"



Fun! Fun! Minigolf Touch! follows *Art Of Balance*, *NanoAssault* and *Jett Rocket*.

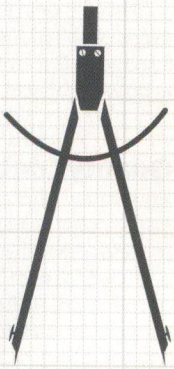
Shin'en Multimedia

Based in Munich, Germany, Shin'en was established in 1999 and has developed games for Game Boy Color, Game Boy Advance, DS, Wii, 3DS and even Wii U. "I think we are known for our so called 'shmups' such as the Iridion or Nanostray series," says company boss, Manfred Linzner. "Besides that, we have a great record of download games for WiiWare, including *Art Of Balance*, *Jett Rocket* and *FAST: Racing League*."



Amoebattle has been inspired by Warcraft III, Command and Conquer 4 and Spore.

Penguin Patrol's appearance on DSiWare took six months of hard work at Intrinsic Games.



explains Intrinsic's Keith Co. "Around eight wildly different ideas were considered and *Amoebattle* was eventually picked from the bunch. Anyone is allowed to pitch an idea, so everyone is involved."

As creative director of the studio, Nnooo's Nic Watt takes the lead on new game ideas. "Before we develop any idea, it rattles around in my head for a long time," he tells **ONM**.

"I visualise it and play about with it until I feel happy that it will be fun and we can achieve it. The very early stages can take months, or years, as they float around in my head being pushed and pulled apart. *Spirit Hunters Inc* (an AR-based DSiWare game) is an idea I have been nurturing for over eight years."

Shin'en's process is a little different. "You really have to try the ideas you have," says Linzner. "Without trying you will never know for sure if they work. We don't believe in writing documents about our games.

"Our documents are never bigger than a two pager. We feel that would be wasting time that ought to be spent trying to see if it's working, so often a project gets greenlit when the prototype looks promising."

Prototyping is the next phase for Intrinsic, too. "Each person brings their perspective to the table," says Co. "The programmer looks at potential complexity, the designer looks at game systems and the fun factor, and then the producer thinks about the scope and size of the project.

"The consensus was that *Amoebattle* would be a good idea to start with and we were given a few weeks to prototype it. It took around four months before the main game systems of *Amoebattle* were finally locked down."

The Blueprint

Over at Nnooo, Watt explains the next steps. "The prototypes can take anywhere from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, depending on how used to the hardware we are and how much experience we have of the technology behind the game.

"Once we are happy with the direction in which the game is heading, we apply to Nintendo for a product code – a kind of ID that is unique to the game – and describe it a little bit further. Nintendo then asks for some more information, or gives us the product code, at which point we can start developing."

As the gatekeeper to its download service, Nintendo itself decides which games to offer over WiiWare, DSiWare

The Nnooo team making the gaming magic happen.

and eShop, but mostly it leaves developers to their own devices, says Intrinsic's Hersh Choksi. "During the development, we submit some info about the project, which Nintendo reviews to ensure that it meets content guidelines, but beyond that we've been free to take the project in the direction we've wanted."

It's mainly technical expertise that Nintendo helps developers out with, says Nnooo's Watt. "We are provided with tools and technology, as well as information on all the tests that will be run on the game.

There are teams we can ask super-technical questions about how the hardware works, or how we can achieve a particular result."

Even after this stage, the project can transform beyond all recognition. Shin'en boss Linzner continues the story. "Often, we start a game with a specific vision and the end product is something completely different and unexpected. For *Nano Assault*, we almost used the same style when it was finished as in the first prototype. In *Jett Rocket* the artwork style changed dramatically. It's really different each time."

Pro Evolution

It's a common theme across all three studios: you can never predict how much the game will change in its journey from concept to completion. Intrinsic's Co offers the most candid summary of how the *Amoebattle* project began. "The original game design was incredibly boring," he tells **ONM**.

"We ended up overhauling one major system after another, sometimes multiple times per system. We slowly got rid of the bad ideas and focused on the good ones.

"We needed to lock down the game systems and make sure the game was fun before we moved onto anything like visuals, sound, or story."

EscapeVektor's genesis was quite different to the final game too, says Nnooo's Watt. "It started as a completely 2D game using sprites," he tells us. "Part way through development we decided it would look better in 3D, as we could then have a dynamic camera to make the action feel more exciting."

Shin'en boss Linzner adds that major changes are all part of the process. "That's the case for almost any Shin'en project," he says.

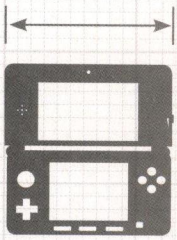
"Sometimes you discover a new gameplay mechanic that even changes the complete gameplay style. For that reason, we always try to make our games very flexible, so that later changes are easy to make."

On The Scrapheap

It's when you ask developers about how much work they've just given up on and thrown away that the development process almost seems wasteful.

Intrinsic's Co is, once more, remarkably honest when he talks about *Amoebattle*: "We considered scrapping the project after three months of prototyping, but we saw a little glimmer of greatness in our prototype, so we kept pushing. A lot

"We considered scrapping it, but we saw a little glimmer of greatness in our prototype, so we kept pushing"



of the scrapped ideas came from us trying to be innovative, but the ideas just didn't work."

It's not just in-game features: in some cases, it's entire game prototypes, reveals Shin'en boss Manfred Linzner. "We had a racing game on GBA that used 3D polygons," he tells **ONM**.

"We still have that prototype – and it's amazing – but it was never finished because we had too much retail work to do at that time."

Going For Gold

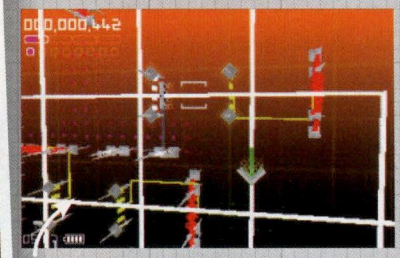
Nnooo has scrapped a project recently too, confirms Watt: "We were working on a title before *Pop* called *Blast* that we had running, but it was proving too big a game for two people to achieve, so we decided to focus on something smaller for the WiiWare launch. We hope to return to *Blast* sometime in the future."

The realities of development mean that any studio must eventually produce something that will pay the bills. It's only development giants like Nintendo itself that have the luxury of spending years perfecting their projects. Every moment the game is still being tweaked, it'll take

Time Crisis

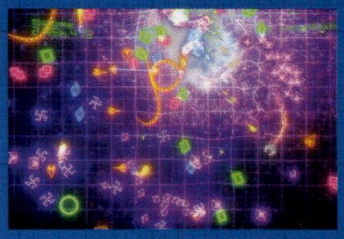
How long it took our featured studios to get their games out there

Fun! Fun! Minigolf Touch! is among the bigger-budget games on eShop, and it shows through in the visuals.



EscapeVektor's first outing on WiiWare was successful enough to spawn a 3DS version.

Intrinsic Games debated the merits of making seven other games before finally settling on Amoebattle.



Geometry Wars helped inspire eShop games such as *escapeVektor*.

Model Behaviour

The big-budget games that inspire these smaller studios

"Most games from Nintendo are an inspiration," says Shin'en's Manfred Linzner. "We also like a lot what Retro Studios did in the last few years." Nnooo's creative director, Nic Watt, agrees, but there are other influences at play. "*Pop* and *escapeVektor* have strong influences in titles such as *Geometry Wars*, and *Pac Man*," adds Watt, "while *Spirit Hunters Inc* was influenced by Pokémon and RPGs."

Intrinsic's Keith Co draws inspiration from the shining examples of the genre he is working in. "For *Amoebattle*, we looked at great RTS titles and tried to incorporate what they did well. The combat system was inspired by *Warcraft III*, while the idea of a baseless RTS was taken from *Command And Conquer 4*."

longer for the final game to go on sale to recoup all of the development costs ploughed into it.

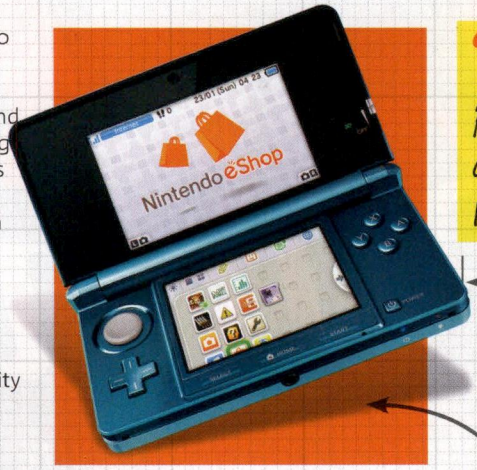
Developers call it "crunch", the tail-end of a project when deadlines are looming and the entire studio is working endless overtime to get the thing finished.

Once the studio itself is satisfied with the game, it's over to Nintendo, says Shin'en's Linzner: "The so-called 'Nintendo lotcheck' is basically an approval of technical requirements; Nintendo doesn't approve gameplay features. Nintendo has a very high quality approval process and makes sure that games are really playable when they come to the customer."

Nnooo's Watt explains further: "Once we pass, we then speak to the eShop teams in the EU and US about what date and price we release the product on or with. Finally we provide them with videos and screenshots so the eShop and the various Nintendo websites have all the info about our game."

Happy Shopping

Once every approval box is ticked, a date is set and the game is ready to go live. "We also have great contacts on the publishing and marketing side of things which helps," continues Watt. "If someone at Nintendo likes your game it makes it more likely they'll feature it in all sorts of places."



Games Nintendo likes can bag a prime spot in the eShop menu.

If Nintendo really likes a third-party developer's game – as it did recently with *Mighty Switch Force* – then it'll gift it valuable extra exposure through promotion on Nintendo.co.uk and a hugely valuable place on the front page of the eShop menu.

It's something that *Fun! Fun! Minigolf Touch!* is enjoying at the time of writing. Clearly, someone at Nintendo UK is a fan of Shin'en's bright and breezy golf game and wants people to download it.

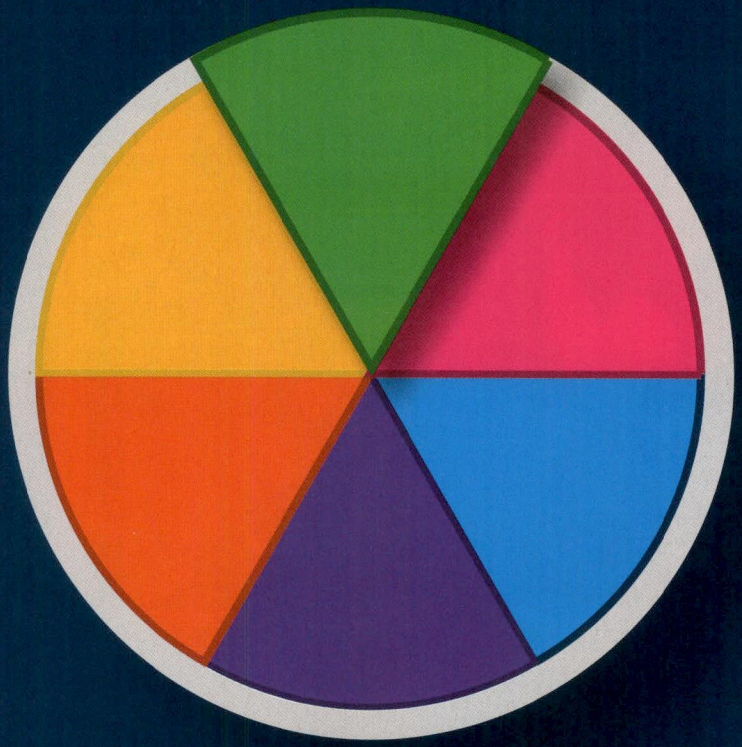
> "A high quality approval process ensures games are really playable when they reach the customer"

It's these behind-the-scenes decisions that can make or break an eShop game, and even an entire game studio. Claim a breakout hit and not only is the studio's future secure, it can plough more money into its next project to ensure it's another quality game (hopefully gaining that extra helping hand that Nintendo can provide, too).

The reverse is also true: release a stinker that nobody downloads and the studio won't make any money back, and possibly might not even survive.

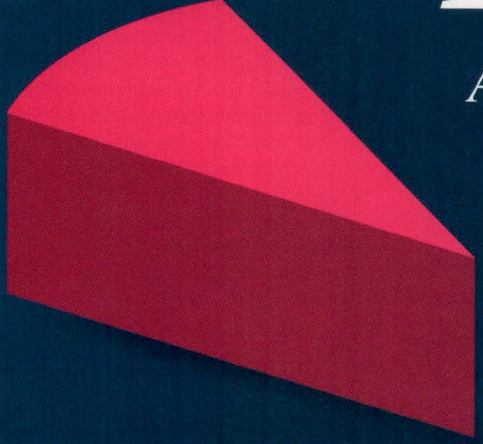
It's not a process that is unique to Nintendo, certainly, but it is definitely one that does reward quality and creativity in more or less equal measure.

In that clash of art and science that comes with developing a videogame, it's the developers that excel in both disciplines that rise to the top. ✚



Trivial Pursuits

A celebration of obscure games based on unspeakably mundane tasks



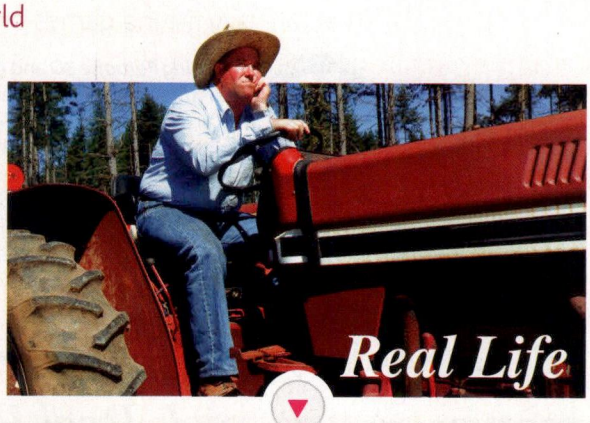
Some video games let us explore incredible new worlds and save the universe. These don't. Believe it or not, there are a handful of games you can buy right now based on more humble pastimes like folding a box or going fishing. They are a celebration of the humdrum, the everyday and the anodyne. It's because these games are so completely, utterly unremarkable that sometimes **ONM** is guilty of overlooking them in favour of, you know, more exciting stuff. But consider that wrong righted and justice done, dear reader. Here we present the dullest things you can do on your Wii, 3DS or DS right now, with surprisingly non-mundane results. ✚

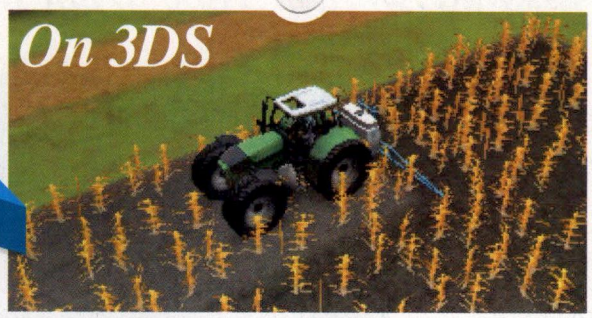
Be A Farmer

Because driving a tractor beats saving the world

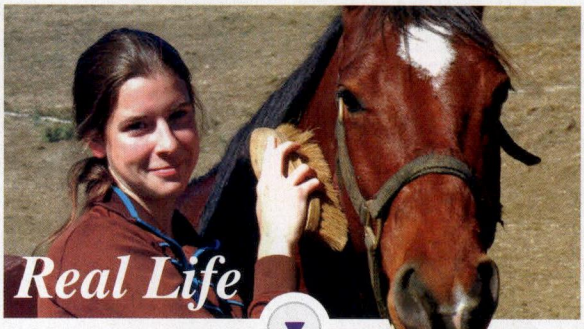
***Farming Simulator 2012 3D* is very much the reason this feature exists. We get a lot of press releases about new games containing phrases like 'raising the bar' and 'built from the ground up', but we** rarely get ones which proudly boast that the game contains "Three different plants: corn, rape and wheat". It puts you in charge of one square kilometre of land and a fleet of farm machinery from such big names as Deutz-Fahr, Krone and (of course) Vogel & Noot. In terms of offering a mundane, slice-of-life dose of farming simulation in three dimensions, it very much represents the high point of the recent 3DS release schedule, but sadly didn't arrive in time for a review this issue.

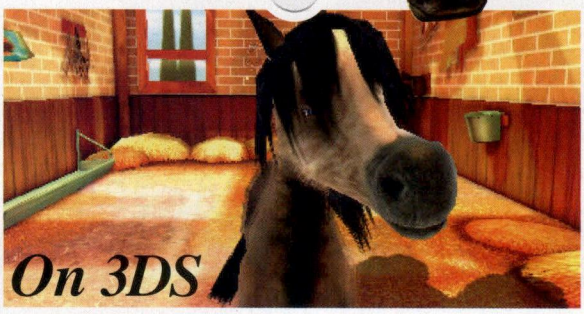
From the info we have, it seems that there is more to being a farmer than pootling around on a tractor with a bit of corn dangling out of your gob. Fertilise your crops, sell them off and you're able to buy (among other machinery) a brand new combine harvester, just like The Wurzels. Organise your farm efficiently enough and you'll make a ton of virtual cash. Then turn it off and re-evaluate what you're doing with your life.





"Buy yourself a brand new combine harvester and live out The Wurzels' dream"

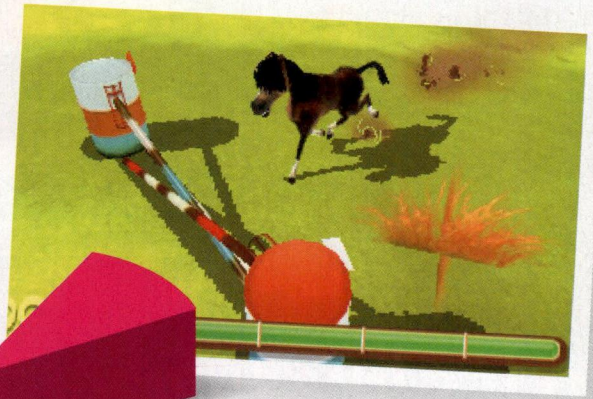




Look After A Horse

Waste your time caring for a pretend animal

Know your Andalusians from your Tersks? Or indeed your 3DS pet sims that aren't as good as *Nintendogs + Cats*? Then *The Whitakers Present Milton And Friends 3D* is for you. It's a below-par 'own a horse' game, but the decent-ish visuals and AR/StreetPass extras show that this isn't the dodgy shovelware it might appear to be. Your own foal can enter into a bloody battle to the death (sorry, that should read beauty contest) against other foals via StreetPass, should you be lucky enough to walk past the other nine people who have bought this game to date. It's inoffensive stuff, but if you really want to look after a cute animal, buy *Nintendogs + Cats* instead.



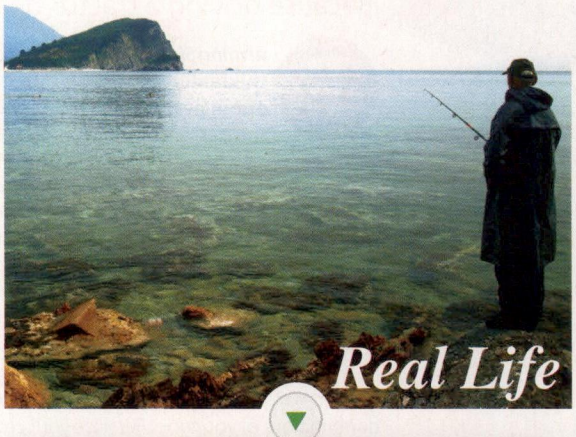
Milton And Friends might be pleasant enough, but it's no *Nintendogs + Cats*.

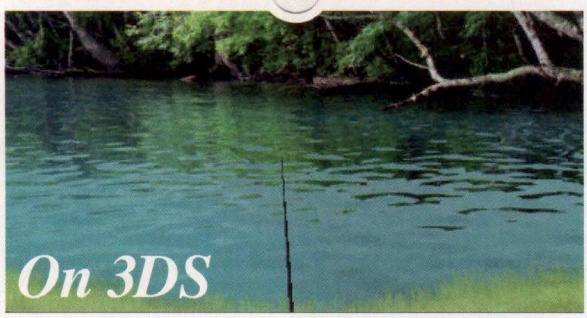
"Your foals can enter into a battle to the death against others"

Go Fishing (twice)

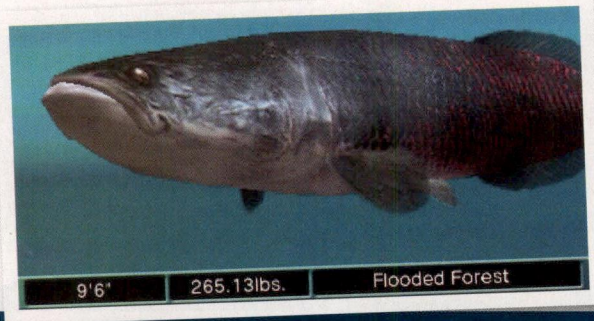
There are *two* fishing games on 3DS. I know!

R*eel Fishing Paradise 3D* and *Anglers Club: Ultimate Bass Fishing* sound extremely similar (because they are), but which is best? Well, *Reel Fishing* has a delicious pun in its title which marks it out as the joker of the two. *Anglers Club*'s all-business subtitle *Ultimate Bass Fishing* means it's for the hard-line ichthyologists among you. If you absolutely must spend real pounds sterling on one, pick *Reel Fishing*. Given the choice between spending £20 on an average 3DS game and sitting by a lake slowly getting pneumonia, we know which we'd prefer.





"If you absolutely must spend money on one, pick Reel Fishing"

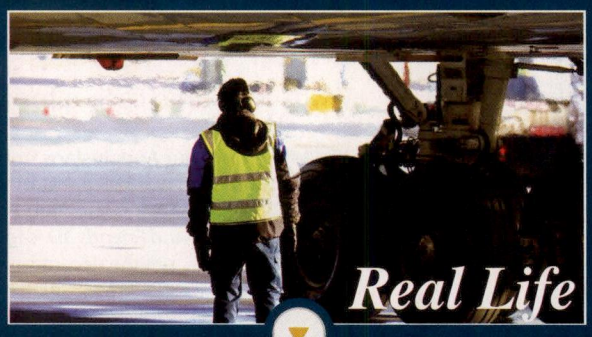


Why so glum, buddy? Oh right, you're stuck in an average fishing game.

Work At An Airport

Prevent the deaths of innocent passengers

The DS is host to an astonishing amount of niche games, among which *Air Traffic Controller* stands proudest. Developed by the brilliantly-named TechnoBrain and localised from Japanese for the UK, it asks you to maintain an orderly flow of air traffic by dictating which planes go into holding patterns, clearing aircraft for landing and lining them up for take-off. After a very slow start, it gets increasingly complex and surprisingly not-terrible. It's like mobile and DSiWare smash *Flight Control* but with less action, more realism and a 'niche Japanese game' feel about it. The payoff for success is not causing the deaths of hundreds of innocent virtual passengers.



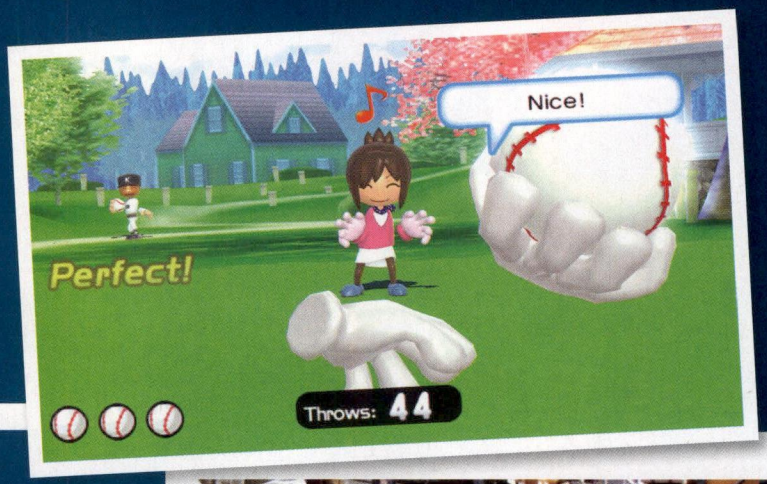
"It's like Flight Control, but with less action and more realism"

Catch A Ball

The virtual joys of not dropping a sphere

Japanese developer Prope is famous for two things: being home to former Sonic talisman, Yuji Naka and for producing the fluorescent, fantastical curio *Let's Tap!* What it is not particularly famous for is this simulation of catching a ball in a field. *Let's Catch* was released on WiiWare in July 2009 and rather predictably sank without a trace, but provides cheery, Mii-infused, Remote-based larks for a little while before repetition and boredom sets in. A rumoured follow-up, *Let's Sit Down And Stare At The Wall For A While*, never surfaced.

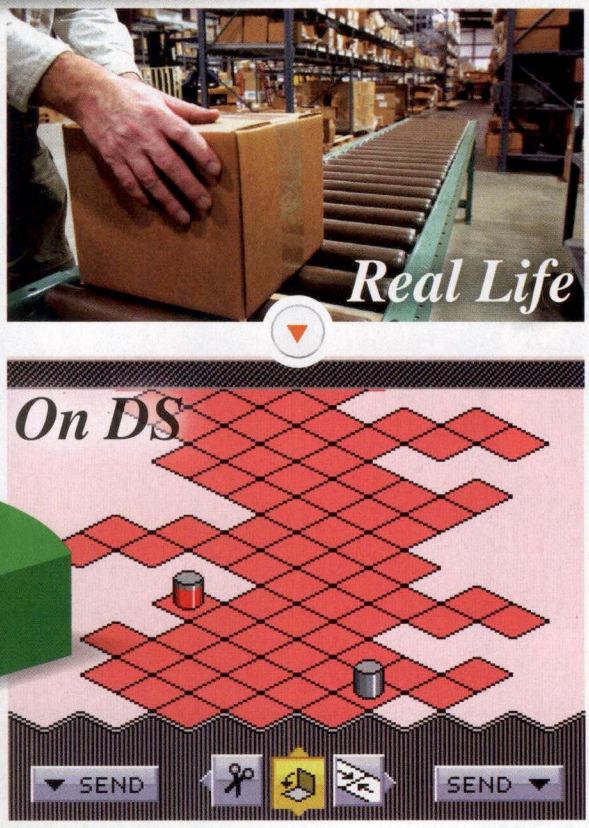
Let's Catch is a WiiWare thrill-ride that just won't quit.

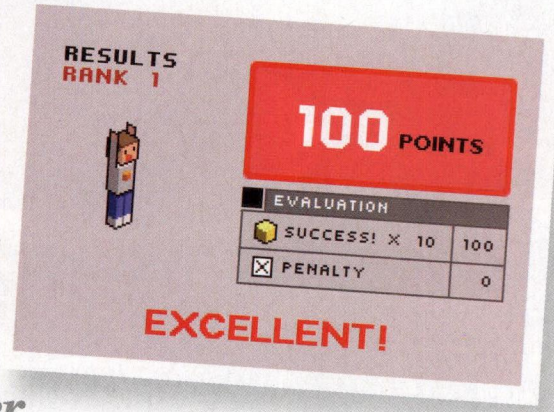


Work In A Factory

Everyday employment misery transformed

Folding boxes in a factory all day sounds like a gentle form of mind-torture rather than a career, yet somehow subversive ArtStyle developer Skip took this concept and made it into the horribly addictive DSiWare puzzler *Boxlife*. Cutting sheets of grid-lined paper with your stylus to make different kinds of boxes, or just making the same box over and over as quickly as possible, is somehow oddly compulsive and with a 'payday' after a day's work, this subtle parody of all things corporate is one of few games in this feature we'd genuinely recommend. Download it on eShop now for £4.50 and thank your lucky stars you don't actually work in a factory. And if you do, sorry about that.





"Make the same box over and over as quickly as possible"

MISSED CONNECTIONS

Could the Nintendo Network define Wii U?

Let's face it, Nintendo isn't exactly at the bleeding edge of online gaming. On the industry stage it is somewhat akin to the pantomime horse's jiggling derriere: dutifully kicking its legs in time with the music, but never truly stepping into the limelight. That's not to say it hasn't had a decent go at it. Historically Nintendo has experimented with online content in ways few others have, plugging digital download capability into the Super Famicom 20 years ago and introducing wireless background updates through SpotPass today.

The multiplayer options within both first and third-party Nintendo games, meanwhile, have always been fast, functional and feature-rich. You need only look as far as *Mario Kart* 7 to see that Nintendo is capable of providing a top-class multiplayer experience.

Greater Expectations

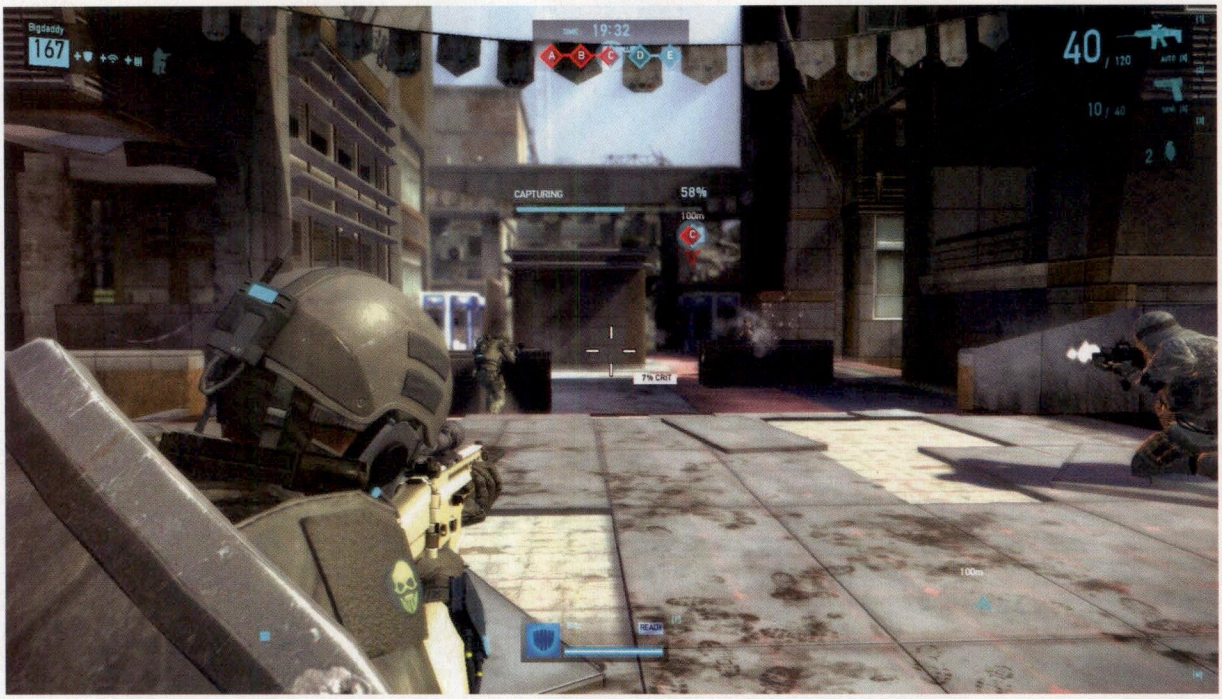
A new attitude to playing games online has taken hold over the last decade, though. The notion that your online identity shouldn't vanish the moment you disconnect is now entrenched, along with the idea that a console should offer a unified online service, rather than a simple portal to an unseen population of waiting gamers. Many players want a shop front, a social space, a place to display their best gaming achievements and their most impressive records: they want to wave their online profiles about like digital peacocks.

Nintendo's recent announcement of Nintendo Network could, in theory, address this demand. It's an online service for Nintendo 3DS and Wii U that will, first and foremost, enable players to purchase extra downloadable content for their games.

More interesting, though, is that the new service will also enable users to download entire games, take part in competitions and promotions, communicate with other users and set up and maintain personal accounts. Whether or not it does away with the

"Mario Kart shows that Nintendo can deliver a top-class multiplayer experience"

Gamers want a way to show off their most impressive feats.



Log on and kill virtual soldiers on the other side of the planet.

Nintendo VS The Internet

Every Nintendo home console has had some form of online capability. Here are some highlights from Nintendo's online past and present

Famicom Modem
1988

Available only in Japan, the Famicom Modem enabled access to a Nintendo server that would furnish users with game cheats and, erm, stock market information. This was 1988, mind you, so you were effectively dialling a premium rate phoneline, something we imagine would have irritated an entire generation of Japanese mothers. You could get weather forecasts, as well as news about upcoming games and reviews of existing ones. You could even get jokes, which is something we'd absolutely love to see return to Nintendo Network.

Satellaview
1995

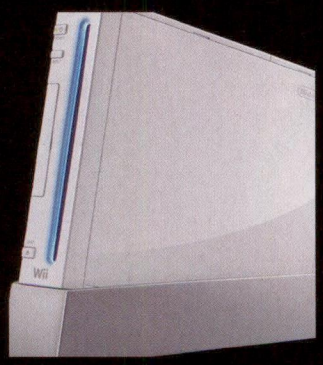
A Japan-exclusive satellite modem add-on for the Super Famicom, the Satellaview could connect to a digital satellite station called St. GIGA where, at certain times of the day, it would broadcast a special digital signal that would be interpreted and decoded into a playable SNES game. These were often Satellaview exclusives, such as a 16-bit remake of the original *Legend Of Zelda* (it got the *Super Mario All-Stars* treatment). It's hardly on-demand downloads, but is certainly a novel example of content delivery.

Nintendo 64DD
1999

The famously ill-fated (and once again, Japan-exclusive) add-on to the Nintendo 64 came with a special modem cartridge that plugged into the console's cart slot. The modem cart contained a port for a modular cable that could connect to RandNet, which was a subscription-based service that facilitated multiplayer, internet browsing, demo downloads and listening to music. Players could trade artwork that they'd created in *Mario Artist*, as well as participate in occasional competitions. The service was discontinued two years later.

GameCube Broadband Adapter
2002

Fitting into the serial port on the console's bum, the GameCube Broadband Adapter managed to claw its way out of Japan and into Europe and America. That's not to suggest it was a success – only four games supported it, and three of those were *Phantasy Star Online* (*Episode I & II*, *Episode I & II Plus* and *Episode III: CARD Revolution*). The fourth was an awesome online role-playing game called *Homeland*, released exclusively in Japan. In it, you could set off on an adventure with dozens of other players. You could even hold hands to boost your abilities.



Wii
2006

The Wii has easily been Nintendo's most well-connected home console to date, and online capability was at its very core. The radical WiiConnect24 pioneered the notion of a console that was always connected, thereby enabling not only the passing of information between friends, but also the downloading of new content, regardless of whether or not the machine was on or off. Nintendo's Virtual Console offered, and continues to offer, a vast, richly varied and ever-expanding library of downloadable content, and multiplayer is a staple of many of the Wii's most popular games.

3DS
2011

While the DS had online capability, it was the 3DS that really pushed the boundaries of handheld connectivity. SpotPass took up the mantle of WiiConnect24 to enable data to be pushed to the console at any time, and StreetPass remains a clever means of *ad hoc* player interaction. *Mario Kart 7* received its own multiplayer channel and supports groups and online leaderboards, while the eShop and Virtual Console are increasingly important features. It's Nintendo's most online-capable device ever and leaves us hopeful that Nintendo Network could be something rather special indeed.

A new generation of gamers wants a social space with an online identity as well as a virtual shop for downloading new content without leaving home.

cold, clinical, personality-free Friend Codes, it'll be a bold step towards a more distinct, persistent and robust service than Nintendo has as yet provided with Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection, which traditionally serves a more *ad hoc* role on DS and Wii. But could this renewed focus on connectivity change the face of Nintendo Wii U entirely?

"In theory, Nintendo Network could be more exciting than (rival platforms) PlayStation Network and Xbox Live," says Chris Dring, deputy editor of industry trade magazine *MCV*. "There's optimism in some circles that Nintendo will throw open its network, enabling digital experts and developers to essentially build and create content for it.

"If Nintendo does this, it will make Nintendo Network the most forward-facing and potentially lucrative platform of the three."

Together As One

As it stands, Microsoft and Sony have been investing heavily in their online services for the best part of the last decade, with Xbox Live and PlayStation Network serving more than 100 million users between them.

Nintendo Network could become just as crucial a component of Nintendo's hardware, current and future, perhaps even providing a standardised multiplayer hub, the likes of which we've already begun to see with *Mario Kart* 7.

Details are sparse, however, and while it's anybody's guess what Nintendo Network might end up being, the Wii U's upcoming re-reveal at E3 in June will almost certainly shed more light on its appearance, features and functions.

Attitudes are clearly shifting at Nintendo: the 3DS is its most online-capable machine yet and the eShop is evidence of a concerted effort to sell stuff online. Nintendo is keenly aware that games and additional game content are increasingly bought and downloaded without customers setting foot in stores.

"Nintendo's target audience is incredibly online-savvy," Dring continues. "Kids today have no problems using messenger services, social networks and download portals. Nintendo knows this and you can expect it to offer a far more robust digital service throughout the year, leading to Wii U."

The emergence of an online service with far broader scope for DLC and full game downloads is being welcomed by developers such as nSpace, which is currently working on the multiplayer-focused RPG *Heroes Of Ruin* for 3DS.

"As developers and huge gamers, we're really excited to see Nintendo pouring so much effort into building such a robust online network," says the studio's creative director, Ted Newman.

"Online platforms, such as the Nintendo Network, are a fantastic opportunity for nSpace, because they provide a wealth of consumer services such as downloadable games, demos and DLC opportunities."

Iwata himself has floated the idea of offering up additional Mario levels for download. In fact, the announcement of Nintendo Network itself was primarily geared towards its potential to act as a storefront for additional downloadable content. "Watching what Nintendo has done in only one year from the launch of the Nintendo 3DS is very promising," Newman continues.

"We here at nSpace are especially excited, since we have some ideas brewing internally that would take great advantage of what the Nintendo Network has to offer."

NINTENDO NETWORK

Network could revolutionise the way we play games online.

Playing Catch-up

But the challenge in launching an online service is huge, and Nintendo's competition is fierce. Industry analyst Michael Pachter believes Nintendo has some catching up to do. "I think that Nintendo creates its devices and content with the Japanese market in mind and online hasn't become a big deal there until now," he suggests.

"The Nintendo Network is starting several years after XBL and PSN, so there is a lot of catching up to do. The others had growing pains, and I expect that Nintendo will have the same."

It's a sentiment echoed by fellow analyst, Nicholas Lovell. "Nintendo now has to learn and make the same mistakes competitors did, but much later in the evolution of online services," says Lovell. "It will be challenging, but as all analysts now always say: you should never underestimate Nintendo." ✚

HAPPY BIRTHDAY 3DS

We celebrate one year of 3DS with the 12 moments that defined the first dozen months of Nintendo's latest handheld

No one forgets their first 3DS moment. It could be blasting the dragon that appeared from your kitchen table in the AR Games, following Navi as she fluttered through Kokiri Forest in *Ocarina Of Time 3D* or seeing an Inky Piranha Plant flob black ink all over the screen in *Super Mario 3D Land*. Everyone has that initial 'wow' moment. Except for **ONM**, whose first experience of 3DS was watching an owl swoop towards the screen in a *Legend Of The Guardians* trailer. Not exactly the coolest first 3DS moment. Still, it wasn't long before we were being Bloopered in *Mario Kart 7*, which remains among the best 3D moments in the debut year of this groundbreaking handheld console.

There have been many more classic moments and not all of them have been actual, proper games. Seeing a friend with a new hat in the StreetPass Mii Plaza fills you with envy, as you want to collect it for yourself, and we still feel excited every time we receive a new note through Letter Box or receive a Pokémon in *Pokédex 3D*.

What is abundantly clear, though, is that it has been an absolutely brilliant first year for Nintendo 3DS. So to celebrate, we've picked 12 great moments that have defined the revolutionary console – one for each month, if you like. Well, not quite. Otherwise we'd have had to pick *Steel Diver* for May. Moving on... ✚

1

Dragon Quest

Remember Nintendo President Satoru Iwata saying that you could have fun with 3DS without even buying a game? He wasn't wrong, because the most mindblowing moment of the 3DS launch was *free*. Seeing Mr AR pop out of the question mark card was cool, but that was nothing compared to seeing your table wobbling up and down like a wave machine before a dragon burst through the surface. If that amazed casual Nintendo fans, veterans would be even more impressed by a fishing game that turned your table into a lake from which you could catch Bloopers, Green Shells and Cheep Cheeps.

There's so much fun to be had with AR Cards as, once you've finished the games, you can take amusing photographs of the AR characters and your Mii in real-life situations or, more recently, watch *Kid Icarus* characters pop out of the cards and battle with each other. This was a moment that kicked off the 3DS in style, but one we're still finding new ways to enjoy in 2012.

Augmented Reality adds fire-breathing dragons to the usual perils of your desktop.

2 Super Street Fighter IV: 3D Edition

Nintendo fans were glad to see *Pilotwings* back while dog lovers were charmed by *Nintendogs + Cats*, but of all the games in the 3DS launch line-up it was *Super Street Fighter IV 3D* that really showed what the the system could do. Wii owners missed out on *Street Fighter IV*, having to 'make do' with the ace *Tatsunoko Vs Capcom*, but all was forgiven when this arrived on launch day.

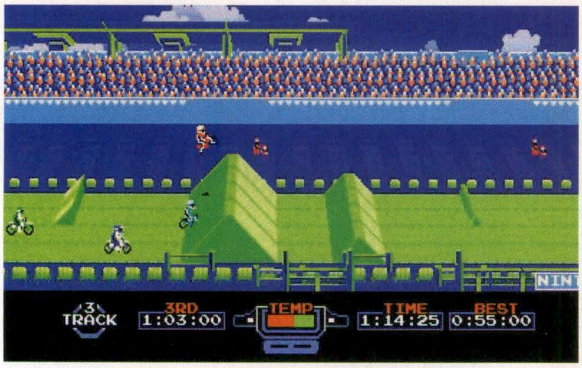
It looked superb and boasted some new features that weren't even in its HD counterparts. An over-the-shoulder camera shook things up for the first time in nearly 25 years while the touchscreen controls made it accessible. Throw in the StreetPass figure battles and the best beat 'em up in the world had got even better on 3DS.

Touch-screen technology opened up a complex fighter to a genuinely mainstream audience.

5 3DS eShop Launches With Retro Classics

If there was one thing missing from the 3DS launch, it was the Virtual Console. After all, you could download classic games such as *Super Mario 64*, *Donkey Kong Country* and *The Legend Of Zelda* when Wii was released way back in 2006. Still, it was all worth the wait when the 3DS eShop launched on 7 June.

It was the same day as Nintendo's big E3 press conference, so as gamers were given a tantalising glimpse of the future with the Wii U reveal, 3DS owners returned to past glories by downloading *Super Mario Land* and *3D Classics: Excitebike*. As if that wasn't enough, Nintendo US boss Reggie Fils-Aime announced from the E3 stage that *Legend Of Zelda: Link's Awakening* would be available within 24 hours. It really doesn't get much better than that.

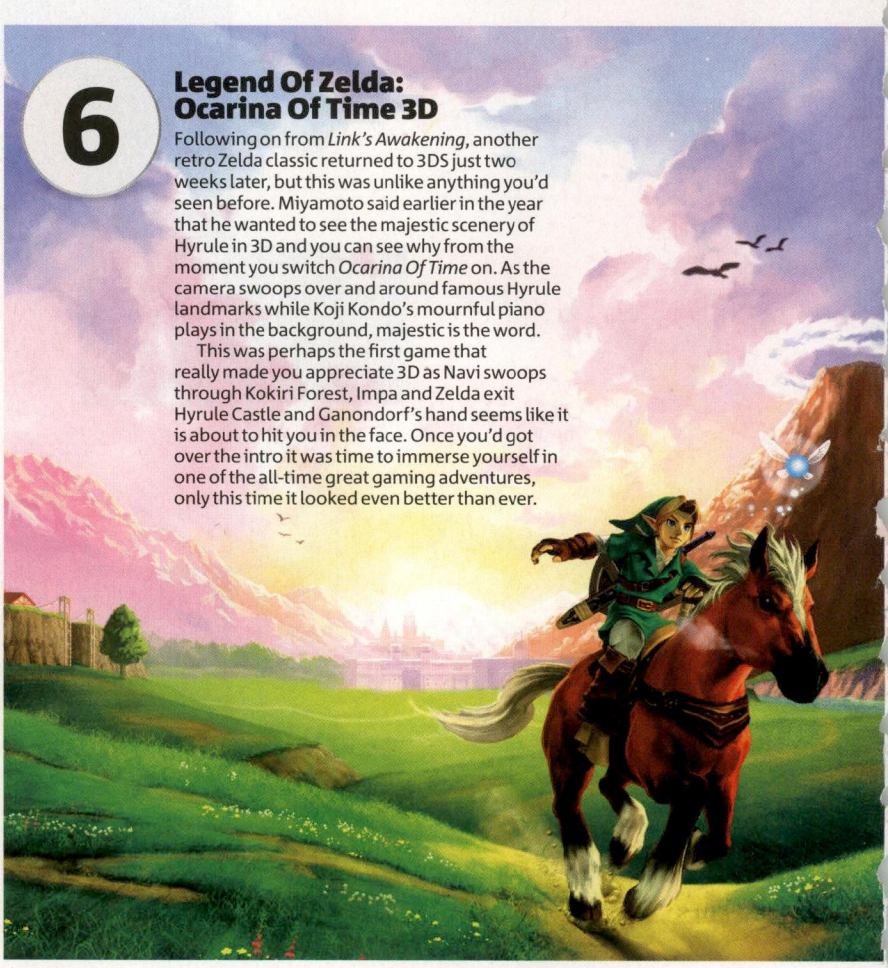


Excitebike was one of many classics given a new lease of life by 3DS eShop.

6 Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time 3D

Following on from *Link's Awakening*, another retro Zelda classic returned to 3DS just two weeks later, but this was unlike anything you'd seen before. Miyamoto said earlier in the year that he wanted to see the majestic scenery of Hyrule in 3D and you can see why from the moment you switch *Ocarina Of Time* on. As the camera swoops over and around famous Hyrule landmarks while Koji Kondo's mournful piano plays in the background, majestic is the word.

This was perhaps the first game that really made you appreciate 3D as Navi swoops through Kokiri Forest, Impa and Zelda exit Hyrule Castle and Ganondorf's hand seems like it is about to hit you in the face. Once you'd got over the intro it was time to immerse yourself in one of the all-time great gaming adventures, only this time it looked even better than ever.



3 Nintendo Video

There weren't any big games released in July, but Nintendo Video was the big event of the month. Announced in January 2011, we were told to expect movie trailers, *Shaun The Sheep*, Sky and Eurosport videos. Instead, we got the adventures of a fly-catching lizard and a few magic tricks. Before the year was out, though, we were treated to Zelda Symphony Orchestra playing the Hyrule Field theme and *Ballad Of The Goddess*, Wayne Rooney scoring an overhead kick in a Sky 3D trailer and, best of all (call us biased, if you want), Nintendo TV in 3D. This year we've also had a *Star Wars 3D* trailer, a Kirby 3D animation and then, finally, Aardman released those 3DS-exclusive *Shaun The Sheep* episodes we'd been promised long ago.

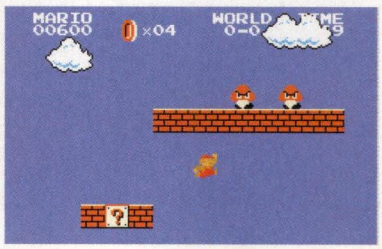
A 3DS displaying the very best use to which its video option can be put.

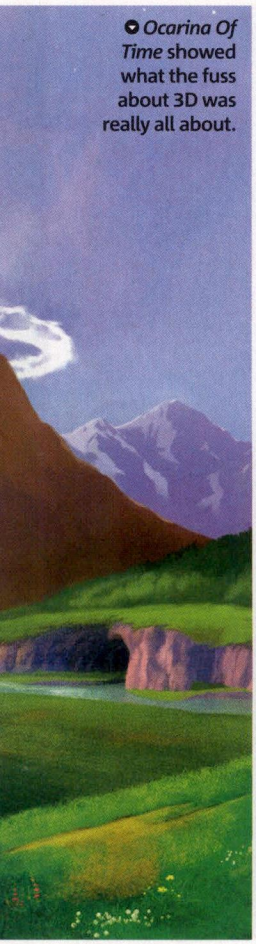
4 3DS Ambassador Games

Three months after 3DS launched, Nintendo announced that it would be cutting the price of its new handheld console. To make it up to loyal fans who had bought 3DS at the original, higher price, Nintendo decided to reward them by calling them 3DS Ambassadors. This wasn't a meaningless platitude, though – this accolade meant that you could download 10 classic NES game for free. You also got a little certificate on your Home screen to prove your dedication to the cause. Having said that, you deserved much more than just a certificate if you managed to complete rock-hard games such as the original *Metroid* and *Zelda 2*, or even finish *Super Mario Bros.* without using Warp Zones.

It got even better later on in the year, when 10 more games – this time from the Game Boy Advance back catalogue – became available for free. With excellent games such as *Metroid Fusion*, *Yoshi's Island*, *Wario Land 4* and *The Legend Of Zelda: Minish Cap* now available to download without any money changing hands, Iwata's claim that you could have lots of fun on 3DS without spending a penny didn't seem quite so outlandish after all.

Ambassadors are noted in society for their *exquisite* taste in retro games.





Ocarina Of Time showed what the fuss about 3D was really all about.

7 Mario Kart 7

Want to play an online game on 3DS? You need to play *Mario Kart 7*. As long as people don't use that cheaty Wuhu Mountain Loop glitch that sees players skipping half the track, this is the most fun you can have in an online game on a Nintendo system. With fewer racers on course than in *Mario Kart Wii*, it's slightly less crazy than before, even if the blue shells, Bloopers and Bullet Bills are still flying around the track.

Unless you turn them off, of course: a brilliant new feature enables you to make your own Mario Kart community and create your own rules. If that means no weapons, so be it. Some might say that makes it more about the racing; we say if you want that sort of racer, play *Ridge Racer 3D*. There's an incentive to play online, too, as building up your Versus Rating will eventually unlock a gold kart. Single-player's not bad either!

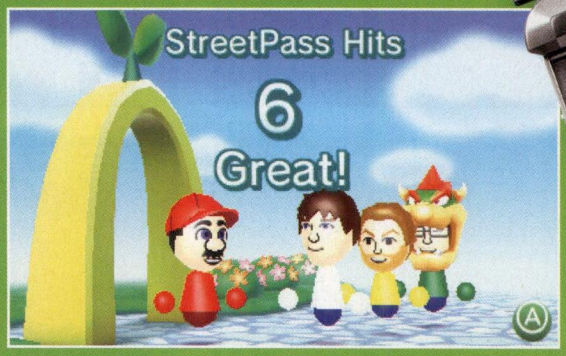
It's hard to think of a game that offers more flat-out fun than *Mario Kart 7*.

8

StreetPass Quest 2

System Update. Hardly the sexiest two words in the whole world. The latest one, to quote Nintendo, brought with it "System stability improvements and other adjustments". Yawn. The one before that was a different story though, as we received 3D Video Recording, some natty new eShop features, new puzzle panels to complete and, best of all, *StreetPass Quest 2*.

It's so good that some **ONM** team members wanted to include it in the last issue's top 100 Nintendo games. Collecting hats has become a daily obsession and anyone who overheard us talking about it would think we were discussing a trip to Royal Ascot, rather than a 3DS monster-slaying RPG. Not that we've ever seen the Duchess of Cambridge wearing a burger on her head at the races. We've played it every day for three months and haven't completed it yet; there will be mixed emotions when we collect our 73rd and final hat.



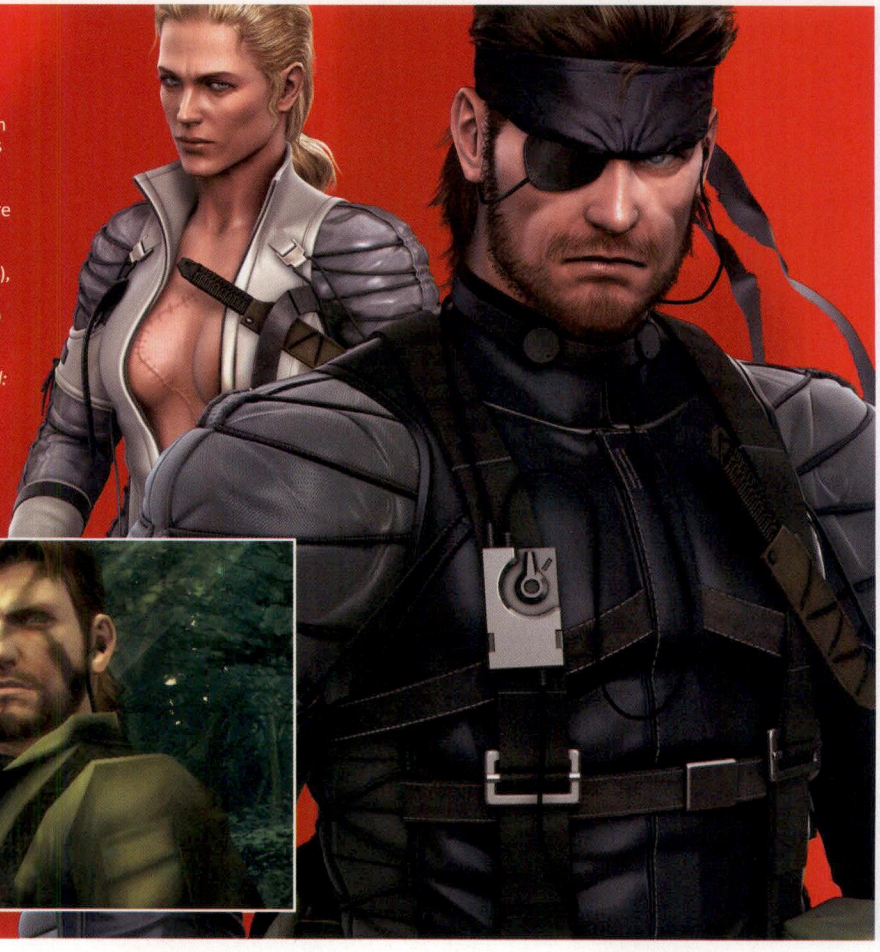
We are ready to bet there isn't a better game about collecting hats out there.

11

3DS Demos

Nintendo has shied away from game demos in the past. Sure, you've been able to download WiiWare demos from the Wii Shop channel for a while but it's only in the last few months that Nintendo has fully embraced demos by giving fans the opportunity to try before you buy with full-price 3DS games. *Cooking Mama 4* aside (sorry, Mama: don't stare at us with your flaming eyes), they've all been blockbusters – games that fans might want to buy but want to make 100 per cent sure before shelling out £30. First up was *Resident Evil Revelations*, then came *Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D* and *Nintendogs + Cats*. You can play these demos 30 times before they're deleted from your 3DS, but by then you should have decided whether or not you want to explore more of the jungle with Snake.

Could *you* play the *Snake Eater* demo 30 times and *not* become utterly hooked?



9 Pullblox

It took a while for 3DS eShop to launch, but we had to wait even longer for our first original 3DS downloadable game, the rather disappointing *Let's Golf 3D*. Five months later, the first essential 3DS download arrived in the shape of *Pullblox* – so good we would have happily paid full price for it from the shops. This instant classic, developed by the apty-named Intelligent Systems – was released in the same month that the original *Tetris* came to 3DS Virtual Console and it deserves to live in the same company. You push and pull blocks in order to rescue children who are trapped in 200 Pullblox dotted around a place called Pullblox Park. There is even a level based on Mario's head, and if you want more levels based on Nintendo characters you can create your own. One fan has even set up a Pokéblox Facebook page with levels based on Pokémon. If he manages to do all 647, he'll deserve a medal.

Rarely has such a simple premise been stretched so far or so brilliantly.

10 Nintendo Letter Box

This has so quickly become a staple 3DS app that's it's hard to believe it hasn't always been around. Nintendo Letter Box (or Swapnote, if you're American) launched just before Christmas and enabled you to scribble messages with the stylus and send them to friends. Most people began by sending Christmas messages to each other, but before long Nikki (the mascot of Letter Box) was sending us a Valentine's Day message, Satoru Iwata and Reggie Fils-Aime were telling us to watch Nintendo Direct and, best of all, Eiji Aonuma sent a message to those who had played *Ocarina Of Time 3D* to say he hoped that we were looking forward to new Legend Of Zelda games. All the messages were delivered on lovely stationery that could be shared, or bought using Play Coins. It's just a great, novel way to chat with friends and that's why we've covered it in-depth on page 46 this issue.

12 Resident Evil Revelations

For our final moment we're going back to the beginning. Remember us saying we were going to pick the moments that defined Nintendo's console? Well, as much as we love *Super Mario 3D Land* and *Star Fox 64 3D*, these games aren't going to make people who don't usually play Nintendo games consider buying a 3DS. It's an entirely different story with *Resident Evil Revelations*.

Not only is it a game that appeals to an older audience (we won't say 'mature', because there's nothing mature about shooting zombies in the face) but considering it's set between *Resident Evil 4* and *5*, surely it's a game that every Resident Evil fan would want in their collection. *Revelations* is probably the best-looking 3DS game yet (alongside *Uprising*) and, although it is a tense affair that harks back to the series' survival horror roots, its new episodic structure means it never feels old. The online Raid mode is brilliant, too.

Revelations really was an, ahem, revelation when it launched on the 3DS.

POKÉMON BLACK & WHITE 2 WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SEE?

The biggest Pokémon game ever is about to be followed by two huge sequels, but what new features would you most like to see in *Pokémon Black 2* and *Pokémon White 2*?

TEAM CHOICE

Neil Long
Editor In Chief

"When's the last time you saw a Bulbasaur in the wild? Never, that's how long it's been. So I think it'd be amazing if Game Freak democratised the Pokédex by making the starters from each game catchable in the wild, like normal Pokémon. Imagine the ease with which you could build an all-star team: Blastoise, Charizard, Venusaur sitting next to one another without having to trade. It'd be heaven, I'd never want for anything again."

"I'm hoping it's more like Gold, Silver or Crystal. You battle a 'reformed' Team Plasma, who are trying to contact Ghetsis (who, unlike Giovanni, actually shows up). Then you have to put a stop to their plans while finding out what happened to N after the events of the first game."

Tamzily01 via the **ONM** forum

"The C Gear should be improved so it could also act as a Pokétch; I'd also like an improved storyline involving Kyurem, a Battle Frontier and the ability to rematch Gym Leaders and Trainers."

Jonathan Craig via Facebook

"It would be really cool, finally, to be able to change how your trainer looks on screen and for this also to be applicable when you're battling online, or in local battles."

Ryan Elsley via Facebook

"Let us run from the start of the game. I mean, who has a special pair of shoes for running in? No one I know does, anyway. Let us walk diagonally!"

Ashley Stegosaurus Harrison via Facebook

TEAM CHOICE

Steve Hogarty
Deputy Editor

"The stories of Pokémon games have been getting incrementally better as the series goes on, but the tried and tested format is now as cutesy and tired out as a tubby pug on a treadmill. Those who played *Pokémon Red* and *Blue* at launch are well on their way to their 30s now (argh!) and Pokémon games have plenty of room for better, much more mature and far funnier writing. As it stands, Pokémon plots just feel, well, patronisingly childish. Change it up, Game Freak!"

"This is going to sound crazy, but I'm thinking hover boards. Naturally, they wouldn't work on water, unless you had the HM power!"

Matthew John Jonas via Facebook

"I want to be able to run my own gym. Manchester City Gym. Leader: Dan. The student with an iron will."

Dan RedWolf Clouston via Facebook

"I would love multiple regions and also opportunities to get hold of older legendaries, either through Wi-Fi, or maybe through in-game events."
Charlotte Steels via Facebook

"Hoenn to reappear! I love Hoenn!"
Vicky Gage via Facebook

"Different story paths, so that certain decisions could alter the story and the ending. Also, more than one save file."
Matthew McCarroll via Facebook

"At the start you should be able to insert your Black and White cartridge and choose one Pokémon to take with you to Hoenn. You then travel around the region trying to find N, while exploring the area and also collecting all the Gym Badges.
SkaRRoki via the **ONM** forum

Gavin Murphy
Nintendo TV
TEAM CHOICE
"I piled about 40 hours of my life into *Pokémon Black* before losing the cartridge. With this in mind, I think Game Freak need to come up with some kind of tracking device that they can embed in the cartridge that emits a high pitched squeal which, if you're a dog or have particularly good hearing you'd be able to decipher as "Gavin Murphy: your Pokémon cartridge is in the salami tray at Covent Garden Subway. Please come find me, I miss you"."

"I'd love to see the first Pokémon in my party following me again, like they did in Pokémon Yellow. I'd also really like to see customisable trainers, so that my character could look a bit more like me (especially her hair and clothes)."
Nina Mayerhofer via Facebook

Tom East
Online Editor
TEAM CHOICE
"Aside from the blindingly obvious choices (walking diagonally and having running shoes from the beginning), I'd really like to see a few more areas like Castelia City. Crossing Skyarrow bridge to reach Castelia City in *Black* and *White* felt really special, but many of the other areas seemed a bit too similar to those in previous Pokémon games, as far as I was concerned. So more big cities, please. And, while I am at it, a few more Pokémon besides Black Kyurem and White Kyurem would be extremely welcome."

Chris Scullion
Games Editor
TEAM CHOICE
"I'm not sure how likely this is but if I was in charge of *Black* and *White 2* I'd have the ability to unlock a previous region, maybe Hoenn, after you finish the main game. The single greatest moment in any Pokémon game for me was completing the main story in *Pokémon Gold* then realising I'd unlocked the entire Kanto region from *Pokémon Red* and was only halfway through the game. I want that feeling again."

Reviews

Edited by Chris Scullion

Brand spanking new Nintendo games rated

GOLD AWARD Nintendo

0-19% Unplayable / **20-49%** Poor / **50-69%** Average / **70-79%** Good / **80-89%** Excellent / **90+%** Gold Award

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Cutesy dead-girl danceathon

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Engaging, balloon-popping fun

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Golfing with your Mii

99 **Kid Icarus: Of Myths And Monsters**
Confusing yourself silly with Pit

100 **Rhythm Thief And The Emperor's Treasure**
Superb, Layton-style puzzler

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Bizarrely entertaining platforming

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Breakout in a 3D style

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Enjoyably tense block puzzle

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Grock-squashing armadillo action

106 **Inazuma Eleven 2**
Deliver the world from evil (again) with your ace soccer skills

Wild west tower defence strategy with armadillos. It's *Dillon's Rolling Western*!

Read all the latest Nintendo game previews and news over at:

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"Elena must wolf down chunks of beast flesh"

GAME OF THE MONTH

Our heroes, in happier times.

Pandora's Tower

Ah, it's the classic boy meets girl, girl is cursed, boy feeds girl handfuls of fresh fantasy monster flesh love story

Wii

Read me

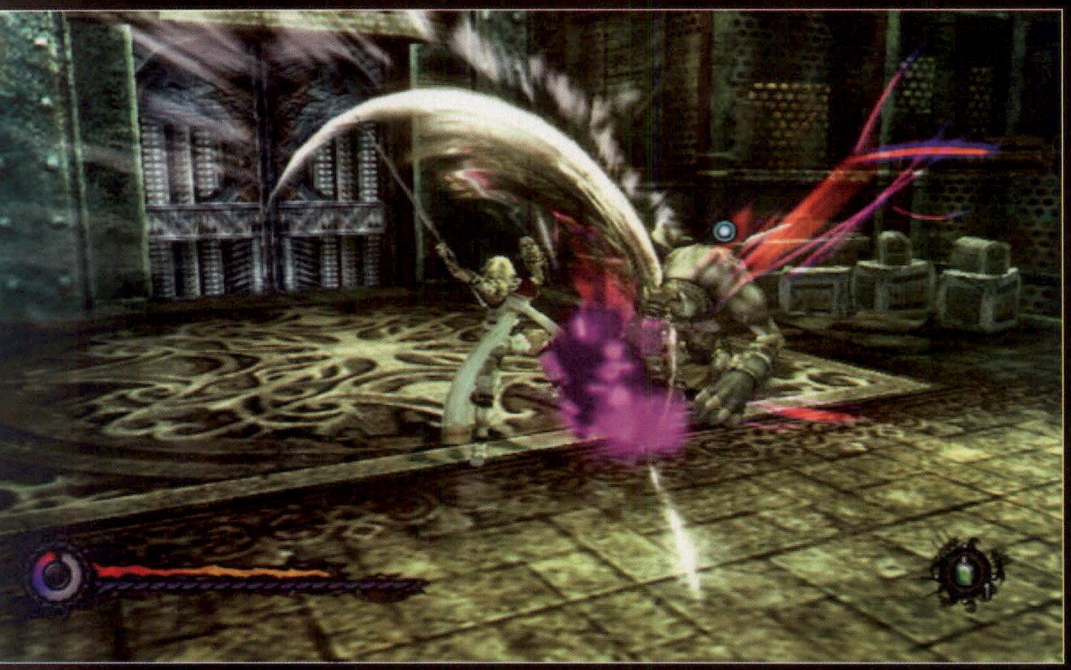
- **Publisher** Nintendo
- **Developer** Ganbarion
- **Multiplayer** No
- **Release** April 13
- **Price** £39.99
- **In a word** Meaty

The twisted fantasy plot is probably the oddest thing about *Pandora's Tower*. Elena is a needy little idiot with not much going on. Aeron is an emotionally awkward, gullible sadsack who barely speaks. Somehow these two people are in love and that drives Aeron to do some seriously strange things to stop Elena transforming into a sort of human slug.

Elena is cursed, you see, fated to morph slowly into a monstrosity should she fail to wolf down the raw chunks of beast flesh Aeron brings her. This flesh temporarily returns her to her human state, but to lift the curse fully she must eat the specialised meat of the master beasts (or bosses, if you want to be pragmatic) who reside in towers suspended over an eerie bottomless chasm. It's a boy-meets-girl love story with a Clive Barker twist.

Strange as the story sounds, it keeps *Pandora's Tower* rooted to one central conceit: the more time you spend away from the girl, the sicker and more beastly she becomes. Elena's health meter, which ticks down steadily as you explore each tower, is stamped permanently in the bottom left corner of the screen as a constant reminder of her deteriorating condition and an indicator of how much time you've got before you should really think about heading back and whacking another fillet of beast flesh into her chirping gob.

Occasionally, the game will cut back to show her pottering aimlessly around the house, falling over and sometimes just wistfully sighing the main character's name followed an ellipsis. A typical helpless Japanese videogame



Ah, a scalding jet of steam, the nemesis of every 3D platforming hero returns.

Make sure you stock up on medicine before taking on a tower's master.

Aeron's the strong, silent type. The strong, silent, flesh-rending type.

You can block and dodge, but only if you're a giant baby. Are you a giant baby?

A simple combo system has you tapping the A button in sync with circles.

Time passes as you play, so those blue skies aren't going to stick around.

"Each of the towers is wonderfully unique and infused with character"

woman, then, albeit one who's found herself in a fairly atypical situation.

The flesh of regular enemies will delay her transformation long enough for you to head back into the tower and tear a chunk of meat from a master, meaning you can either try to speed-run these levels in order to grab the curse-reversing boss-meat or explore the tower more thoroughly (to find materials and new equipment) while making regular trips home to top her up with plain flesh.

Why can't you just leave a pile of beast flesh at home for her to nibble on while you're away, you ask? Because flesh dries out to uselessness once it leaves the tower, of course. There are no fridges in this weird world, sadly.

The transformation and subsequent scarfing down of flesh itself is rather harrowing. Spend a bit too much time adventuring and you'll find that when you return Elena will have slithered off into the basement leaving behind a trail of sticky, purple goo. In this state, her bubbling, blistered skin looks like molten blueberry pie as she, hiding in a corner and shrouded in shame, convulses and moans pitifully. It's grim stuff.

If you dote on her, however and regularly return to her before the curse really takes hold, the worst you'll have to witness is a bit of a manky arm. Either way, her protesting at having to eat these grotesque lumps of raw, dripping meat is the game's heartstrings-tugging, stomach-turning mainstay (and *Pandora's Tower* doesn't flinch in representing the grisly ordeal, either). Her affinity for the protagonist will increase if you treat her well, visit her plenty and shower her in gifts, while ultimately your treatment of Elena will also determine which of the game's endings you'll see.

Towerful Stuff

So that's the backstory and your ultimate responsibility. When you're not looking after your Tamagotchi girlfriend, the action plays out in hack and slash style as Aeron traverses each of the towers in turn, first discovering the location of the boss's room before destroying the giant chains that lock said room shut, running inside and ruining the day of that tower's master. Each of these towers is wonderfully unique and character-infused, from the very first, which features as its centrepoint a huge upside-down tree, to other themes lifted directly from the Legend Of Zelda playbook: you have your water towers and your fire towers, for instance. While structurally similar, each feels visually unique and incorporates its own cast of unique elemental beasties.

Inventory management adds another tactical edge to *Pandora's Tower*, as you

Second Opinion

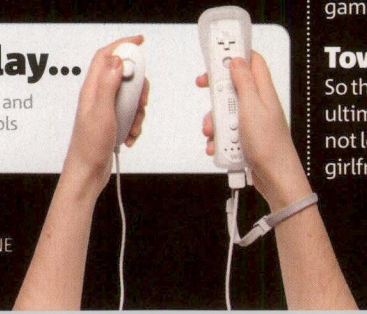
Editor In Chief Neil Long

"The combat's interesting, but just too fiddly. The towers are beautifully designed though."

Allow Elena's condition to deteriorate and she's not going to like you very much.

Best way to play...

You'll have to use the Wii remote and nunchuk here, as the chain controls require you to point and click.



Some boss fights are more straightforward than others, but they all follow the classic "starts new attack patterns once at half-health" tactic.

You can lose your chain by wrapping around two enemies and forgetting about it. You can also hold down C to pull it, even when standing still.

When A Problem Comes Along...

Whip anything nasty that comes your way into submission with your pleasingly versatile chain

Assault From Afar

Hold B to zoom in on an enemy and select a body part. As you move the cursor, time slows and various body parts are highlighted.

Put In Some Legwork

Releasing B fires the chain at the enemy, wrapping it around his knees and tripping him up. You're now free to slash him to bits with your sword.

Red Or Dead

Enemies near-death start to glow red. Continue bashing them for an item, or use your chain once again to 'whip out' a better kind of item.

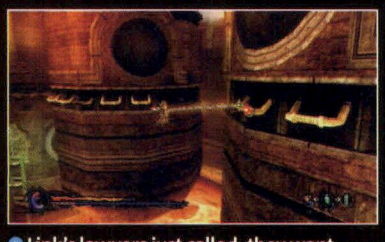
Chainkillers

Bind two enemies together while you deal with bigger foes, or use the chain almost like a gun, taking potshots at enemies from afar.

can only carry a certain amount of stuff at once. Your trunk back home can be used to dump excess materials, which can be retrieved for use in crafting and weapon upgrading. Again, ensuring you've got enough space in your backpack before heading out on a sortie will reduce the number of trips you'll have to make and ultimately lead to a happier beast-woman.

Chain Gang

Your primary weapon is a multi-functional, 20-foot long spiked chain that can wrap around enemies and objects. Combat is varied and strategic, with the eminently useful chain coming into use in almost every fight. Aiming the remote at the screen, you hold down B to slow time and carefully choose your target using a magnifying reticle. You can then swing and wrap your chain around individual



Link's lawyers just called, they want their exactly what you're doing back.

Love

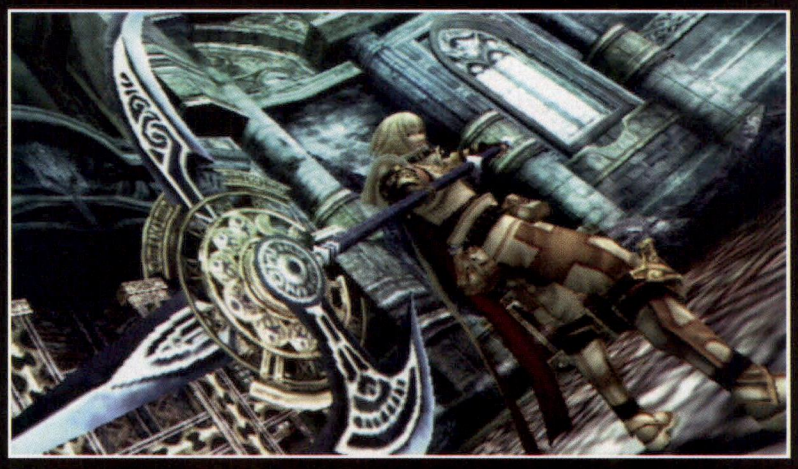
Chained Melody
Using the chain to swing about the place like a fantasy Tarzan is great fun.

Feeding Time
Elena's grim transformation from girl to slug is delightfully disgusting.

Master Stroke
The boss battles are clever and engaging tests of your fighting expertise.

Leave Elena alone for too long and she develops a severe case of Kermit hands.

Yanking out a huge lump of master flesh after a boss fight is weirdly satisfying.



Aeron's a weedy chap, but he can wield swords several times taller than himself.

"Combat is varied and strategic: your chain is eminently useful"

Some of the more powerful combos result in plenty of fireworks.

The fixed camera angles can be a pain in the bum if they start working against you.

"If you want I could fry it up with a cheeky bit of rosemary. Proper pukka."

You can find new weapons, but it pays to focus on upgrading just one of them.

Your chain can be used to pull switches from afar.

Boss battles are presented beautifully through introductory cutscenes.

limbs for different results: fire your chain at a beast's legs and they'll be immobilised, but still dangerous. Wrap your chain around their head and they'll be blinded, striking wildly with their free limbs. Bind their arms and they'll be far less dangerous, but no less mobile.

Smaller chained enemies can be spun around by shaking the nunchuk, or thrown by pointing the cursor towards walls, pits or ledges and pressing A to fling them. Enemies can even be tied to one another using the chain, slowing them both down long enough for you to focus on feistier enemies. While bound together, attacks on one enemy will damage the other, too.

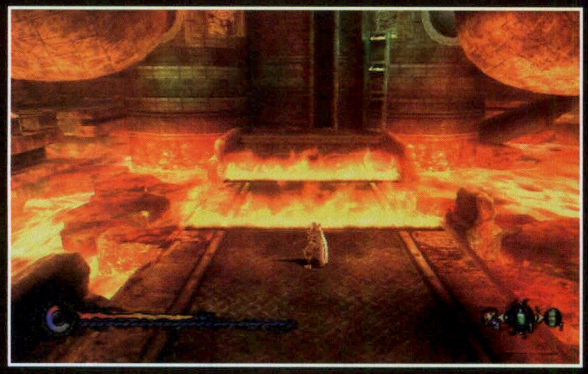
If Aeron is still holding one end of the chain once it's been wrapped around a beast, you can whip the remote to forcefully yank the chain away and damage the enemy. It really is a useful thing and it becomes stronger as you play and level up.

"You can increase the amount of damage by pulling the chain taut"

If *Pandora's Tower* is about anything, it's time management and your chain is your greatest tool for dealing efficiently with rooms of enemies.

The chain isn't just deployed in combat either: it's used much like Link's hookshot to pull Aeron towards certain distant ledges and retrieve items from afar. It can be used to swing, too, and in one puzzle it enables you to embed chunks of gold ore in a wall that can then be climbed. The chain has a satisfying sense of physicality, as you can extend and retract it manually using the C button, watching it slacken and coil around your feet or snap tight as Aeron wraps it around a distant lever and pulls back against its weight.

Squint and this could almost be a scene from *Skyward Sword*.



Mister Whippy

Mixing up chain and sword attacks in combat is key to survival in *Pandora's Tower*. Your sword and other weapons can be upgraded using items found in towers, and as you level up your blade you can perform increasingly complex combos. Stringing together attacks is achieved by timing your button presses to flashing blue rings around Aeron. It's a fairly forgiving system once you get a proper feel for it.

Despite the technical combat, slugging it out with plain beasts in towers can at times feel old-school sloppy. Aeron doesn't quite auto-target his enemies, meaning your combos can shave rather than eviscerate.

While your whip has a great sense of impact, your sword feels weak and transparent as it feebly clips through the enemy models. Your basic combo also triggers an animation that moves Aeron forwards, causing him to fall off ledges in certain environments. The 'attack' button is also the 'open door' button, which makes fighting near doors a weird gamble in which, at any moment, Aeron might just up and leave the room like a capricious celeb.

These niggles are easily forgivable in isolation, but will often align to create the occasional moment of total frustration. The game makes such demands on your time and enemy encounters are so time-consuming, that you'll begin to simply run past beasts in pursuit of your ultimate goal. The reasons for stopping – you earn XP and

Some well produced FMV cutscenes progress the story and explain precisely how poor Elena came to be cursed. There's a lot of backstory to absorb.

"You are the weakest link," mumbles Aeron, "goodbye." He smiles and turns around, but he is utterly alone. He sighs and his shoulders sag slightly.

Every tower has its own thing going on. This one's all covered in crystals for example. As you explore you discover journals explaining your surroundings.

Each temple is relatively short, taking somewhere between forty-five minutes to an hour to complete. Unless you get stuck at this bit like we did.

level up, gain beast flesh to feed to Elena and find items to craft and upgrade weapons – often just don't feel immediate enough: you've got bigger fish to fry. After a few hours of play, the combat no longer feels as clever, instead it becomes something of a chore and a tedious speedbump.

The masters of each tower are excellently designed and are reminiscent of the PlayStation 2 classic, *Shadow Of The Colossus*. Each has a glowing weak spot around which you must wrap the chain, before violently tugging it back out, inflicting damage.

You can increase the amount of damage you do by pulling the chain taut and 'charging' it, though this takes time and restricts your movement somewhat. Should the master hit you while you're charging the chain, or move in such a way as to free itself from the chain, you'll lose the opportunity to cause significant amounts of damage. Deciding when to charge and when to whip the chain back out and cash in your charged damage is key, especially in later master battles.

All dogs must be kept on a leash then beaten to within an inch of their lives.

Spot The Difference

Every master that you face has a unique weak spot. Some have it whizzing around their body on a sort of fleshy, weak-point Scalextric track. Others will only reveal it when their armour is whipped away from them, while some need to be tethered to the environment long enough to keep them still while you take time to find it.

Weaken the master enough and Aeron will be able to fish out a grand old lump of curse-reversing flesh. Masters, curiously, are docile right up until you start smacking them with chains and all sorts. Read into that what you will: especially if what you read is a neat *King Kong* style 'who's the real monster here?' subtext. But with less Jack Black.

Pandora's Tower's grim and desperate plot throws its beautiful world into sharp relief, but while it is initially fascinating, the repetition of feeding your be-tentacled girlfriend between clambering up a dozen towers eventually wears thin.

The combat, while tactical and diverse, never quite feels natural or fluid. The voice acting is oddly sparse and mildly embarrassing and issues with the fixed camera angles routinely crop up over the 12 or so hours it'll ought to take you to finish it.

Hate

Falling Down
Combat can sometimes send you plummeting right off ledges.

You Never Call
Repeatedly having to traipse back to look after Elena can be a chore.

Sent Packing
Inventory management is a needlessly tedious exercise in admin. Yawn.

Your handy chain can be used to solve some basic – very basic – puzzles.

This is an average-to-good hack and slash that is unfortunately hobbled by some off-the-shelf RPG elements and a well-meaning – if ultimately tiresome – girlfriend management system.

Pandora's Tower is well worth playing for its brilliant and inventive boss battles, arrestingly emotive moments of flesh-guzzling and for its stunning, amazingly varied scenery, but beware the tedious and generic hack-and-slash nature of the moments in between.

+Steve Hogarty

Verdict

Nintendo

A dark and mature story dogged by some ropey controls and camera angles.

70%

The dance challenges are undertaken using the sort of tapping technique that *Elite Beat Agents* fans will recognise.

Your multi-talented moggy speaks to spooks.

The *danse macabre* has never looked so cute or so much fun.

Jump to the left, step to the right...it's the pelvic thrust that's the really tricky bit.

Try not to mess up early on, as there's no means of bailing quickly and restarting.

NINTENDO 3DS

Read me
- **Publisher** Fun Box Media
- **Developer** Natsume
- **Multiplayer** No
- **Release** Out now
- **Price** £29.99
- **In a word** Undead

Gabrielle's Ghostly Groove 3D

You'll believe that werewolves really can dance to salsa music

Not many games start with a young girl sneezing herself to death, but that's the opening gambit offered in *Gabrielle's Ghostly Groove*. After a huge sneeze that blasts her spirit right out of her body, the now spectral heroine has to travel to various spooky locations with her cat (who can speak to ghosts) and dance to scare humans and collect enough screams to return to her body.

The groove in question takes place over 19 fairly short songs, none of which are particularly catchy. The gameplay itself is passable enough, though, with responsive controls and an effective, *Elite Beat Agents*-style tapping mechanic.

Once you finish the game you can also play through the tracks again in Hard or Impossible difficulties, though this does make the initial playthrough a rather frustrating experience for more advanced gamers who are forced to play on the lower difficulty setting.

Also annoying at times are the cut-scenes before and after each song. These are well-written and adorably presented (younger gamers will lap them up) but they go on a little too long and can't be skipped, leading to some marathon bashing of the A button when you want to just play the game.

The final nuisance is the inability to pause the game once a song's started, which means that you can't do a quick restart if you mess up the first note and must sit through the whole song.

Groove Is In The Garb

Younger players will still enjoy playing through the game as they'll get different hairstyles, accessories and outfits for Gabrielle as they reach certain milestones. There are around 120 items to collect, making for a wide variety of customisation options; if you want a green-skinned zombie with long black hair, or a quirky punk with a tartan skirt and pink pigtails, it's all possible.

Ultimately, *Gabrielle's Ghostly Groove* just doesn't offer enough for older players to return to. Younger gamers will love how cute it all is and will enjoy learning and mastering the timing for each of the tracks, but for everyone else the whole story mode (button-mashing cut scenes and all) can be licked in a couple of hours with ease and by the time extra difficulty levels have been unlocked many will have already lost interest.

Some will love *Gabrielle's Ghostly Groove* despite its downfalls, because it looks so adorable. If you're one such person we'd recommend that you try out *Gabrielle's Ghostly Groove: Monster Mix* on WiiWare first. It may only have 10 songs compared to this game's 19, but it's only 500 Points, supports up to four players and has a completely different story, meaning you can then get the 3DS version if you like what you played.

+ Chris Scullion

Best way to play...

The game is played with the stylus as you tap, flick and drag across the touchscreen depending on the icons that appear.

Verdict | Nintendo

Cuter than a puppy knitting a little scarf, but very frustrating in some key areas.

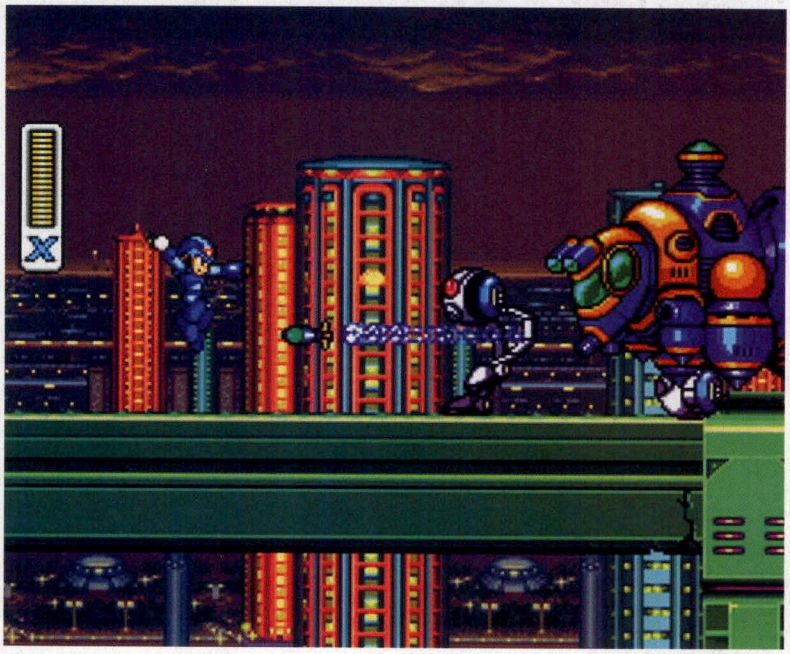
60%

WiiWare

Read me
- **Publisher** Capcom
- **Developer** Capcom
- **Multiplayer** No
- **Release** Out Now
- **Price** 800 Points
- **In a word** Mega

Mega Man X

The Man's SNES debut definitely has the X factor



The enemies in *Mega Man X* are a surefire source of amusement.

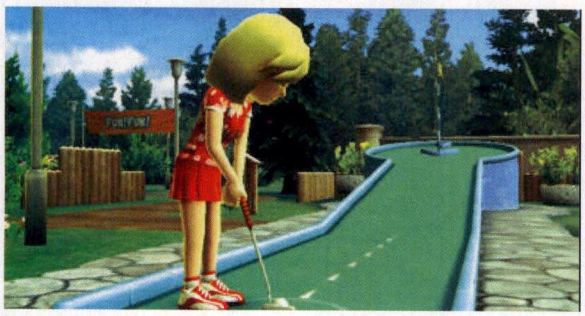
Why have Mario and Sonic endured while Mega Man is close to being put into retirement? Is it because running right and shooting things has gone out of fashion, while running right and bouncing on heads hasn't?

Released in 1994, Mega Man took his time to make his SNES debut, but it was worth the wait, Set 100 years later, *Mega Man X* shook things up by giving the blue bot wall-jumping skills, a chargeable X-buster arm cannon and new weapons upon completing each of the game's eight levels.

Some complained that it was too easy and, admittedly, it's not as tough as *Mega Man 2*, but it's a challenge and a joy to play from beginning to end, as Mega Man comes up against some excellent enemies, including an ice-breathing penguin and a mandrill that attacks you with electricity. So good, it spawned eight sequels. Throw in the main series plus *Legends*, *Battle Network* and *Zero* and he's starred in over 50 games. No wonder he's ready to hang up his blue boots.

Nintendo **86%**

+ Tom East



Putting is almost laughably simple and there's a lack of real incentives.

It can be hard to be sure about where you have or haven't been.

Fun! Fun! Mini-Golf Touch

Play mini-golf with your Mii

Nintendo eShop

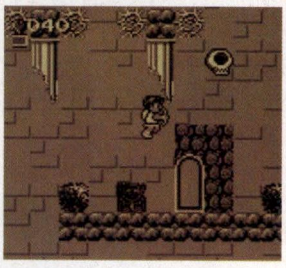
Read me
- **Publisher** Shin'en
- **Developer** Shin'en
- **Multiplayer** No
- **Release** Out Now
- **Price** £4.70
- **In a word** Casual

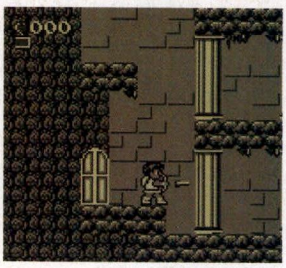
To be 'casual' in the 1980s was to be cool. These days, it's more likely to mean that you support Manchester United but haven't been to Old Trafford, or that you own a Wii, but have never played a Zelda game. At first, this looks like a game that would appeal to the *Wii Sports* crowd: it's easy to control with the stylus, you can play as your Mii and putting is simple.

That said, getting gold medals on every course is tough as the pars are set low but, considering you unlock the courses with easily earned cash, rather than medals, there is little incentive to keep playing. The lack of a multiplayer mode is also a major issue.With *Pilotwings Resort*-style 3D visuals, it looks lovely and it does live up to its name at first, even if it is really a bit lightweight in the long run.

Nintendo **65%**

+ Tom East





Kid Icarus: Of Myths And Monsters

Pit the younger leaves us confused

Nintendo eShop

Read me
- **Publisher** Nintendo
- **Developer** Nintendo
- **Multiplayer** No
- **Release** Out Now
- **Price** £2.70
- **In a word** Hardcore

Many complained that the original *Kid Icarus* was too hard, with only one mistimed jump between you and death. So, for the Game Boy follow-up Nintendo has done a bit of DIY, putting in some flooring and corridors. We wish it hadn't, because it just becomes confusing, with levels stretching infinitely to the left and right and rooms repeating as you continue moving in a certain direction.

There are only four worlds, but with enemies appearing beneath your feet and tough bosses that make you wish for the return of the clichéd 'three-hits and you're down' routine, it's not easy. Like *Metroid 2*, this is more substantial than many 3DS Virtual Console games, but it's a bit too confusing to be genuinely enjoyable.

Nintendo **57%**

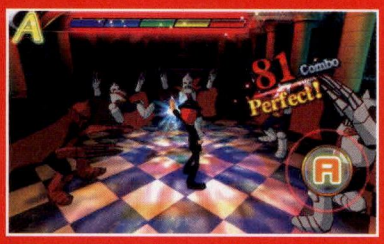
+ Tom East

"It's Layton with rhythm games rather than puzzles"

The narrative Arc in *Rhythm Thief* is nothing short of a Triomphe.

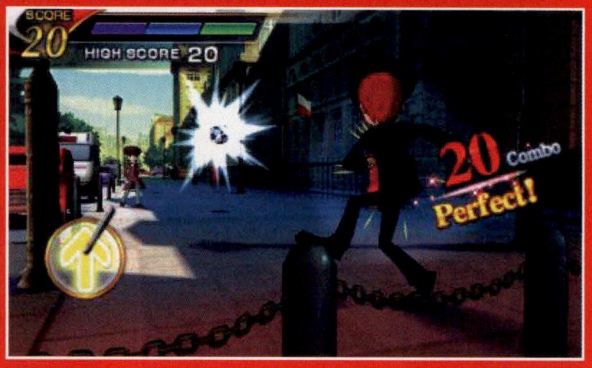
It's surprising that the Paris police can't tell that Raphael is actually Phantom R, because all he really does is take his glasses off and put on a hat. It's hardly *The X-Files* is it?

This is the first boss battle of sorts and sees you attacking enemies from either side using the D-Pad and A button.



There's a seemingly endless supply of undead soldiers to fight at certain points.

If you can't perfect your wine-pouring technique you'll struggle to live in Paris.



This little scruff tries to hit you with his ball. You have to keep kicking it back *Rhythm Paradise*-style until it smacks his face.

NINTENDO 3DS

Read me

- **Publisher** Nintendo
- **Developer** Sega
- **Multiplayer** 1-2
- **Release** Out now
- **Price** £29.99
- **In a word** Catchy

Rhythm Thief And The Emperor's Treasure

Professor Layton meets Rhythm Paradise in this brilliant adventure

It's usually a good sign when Nintendo takes over publishing duties on a game set to be released by a different publisher. More often than not, it means the game is of very high quality and Nintendo is publishing it so it can put its marketing force behind it to get people to notice it more. It's done this deal plenty of times with Capcom games in the past (*Monster Hunter Tri*, *Super Street Fighter IV 3D Edition* and *Resident Evil Revelations* were all published by Nintendo in the UK), and now it's doing the same deal with Sega for *Rhythm Thief*. Does this mean it's a great game, too? You'd better believe it.

Set in Paris, *Rhythm Thief And The Emperor's Treasure* tells the story of Raphael, a young boy living on his own with just his dog, Fondue, for company. What his fellow Frenchmen don't know however is that Raphael is actually the mysterious Phantom R, an eccentric criminal who steals valuable works of art. His intentions are undeniably noble: Raphael is trying to use the pilfered art to get to the bottom of his father's mysterious disappearance, and he plans to return everything later (natch) – but that, obviously, doesn't stop the narked French fuzz wanting to slap some handcuffs on him smartish.

Oh, and there's also the odd matter of Napoleon Bonaparte rising from the dead after nearly 200 years of being worm food, which for some reason is also linked to Raphael's dad.

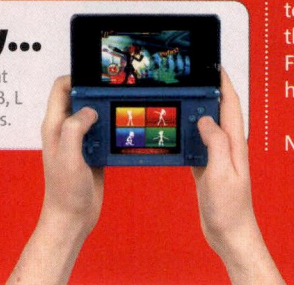
This Lukes Familiar

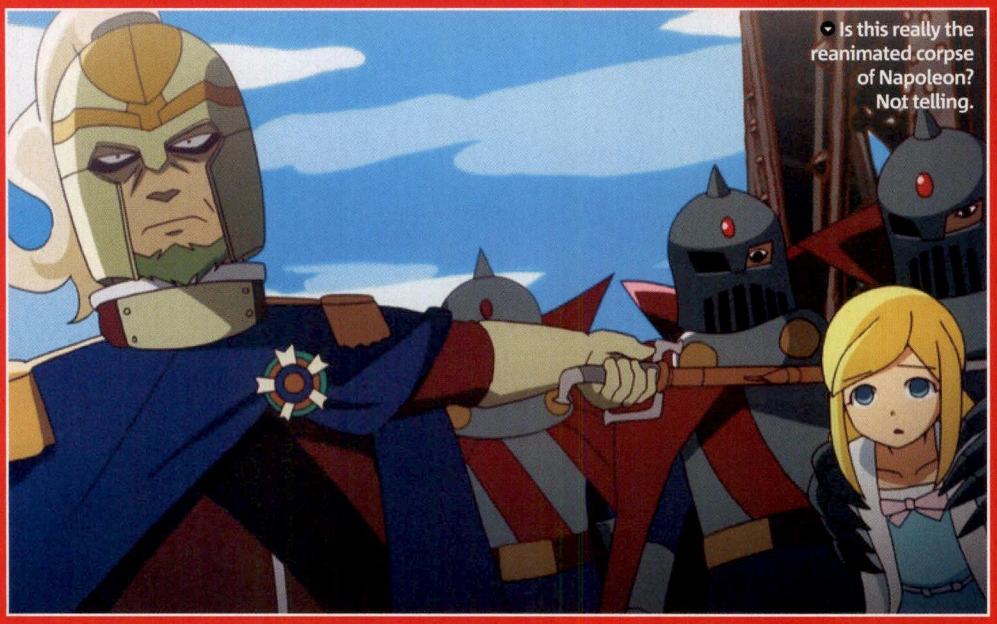
At its core, *Rhythm Thief And The Emperor's Treasure* can be described in one sentence: it's Professor Layton with rhythm mini-games instead of puzzles. Within half an hour it's abundantly clear that Sega's game borrows liberally from Level-5's excellent Professor Layton games, from the dialogue scenes to the way each 'puzzle' is numbered, right down to the way you tap parts of the screen to find hidden coins.

But whereas most of the time this sort of imitation would be grounds for heavy criticism, *Rhythm Thief* comes up with a clever way of avoiding the flak – it does most things better than Layton. The

Best way to play...

Each mini-game is played in a different way: you'll be using the stylus, the A, B, L and R buttons and even the tilt sensors.

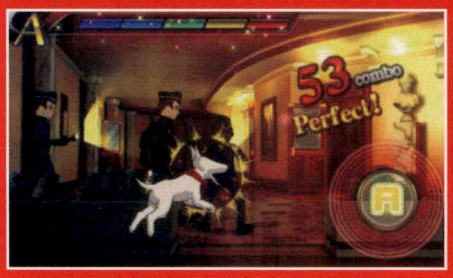




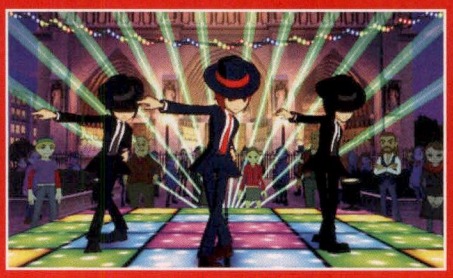
Is this really the reanimated corpse of Napoleon? Not telling.

The dance game is like a modern day *Beauty And The Beast*. Only with tapping.

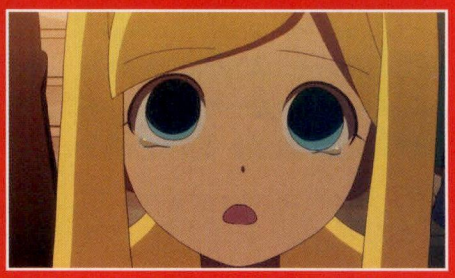
What's the point in cooking that meat? French steaks are famously bloody.



It's not just Raphael who gets a taste of the action, his dog Fondue gets stuck in as well.



Andy and his chums thought they were legends but everyone else at the club secretly hated them.



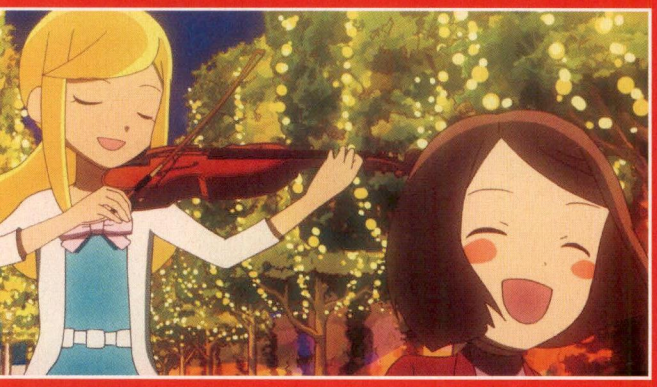
The lovely Marie: romantic interest and the owner of a surprisingly un-annoying accent.

"In terms of presentation this blows Layton clean out of the water"

music – an already much-loved aspect of the Professor Layton games – is even better here (well, it's to be expected from a game that focuses on rhythm).

The animated cutscenes, meanwhile, are breathtaking in terms of both quality and clarity and progressing from screen to screen is much quicker and less repetitive than it is in the Layton games. Even when Raphael meets his token British partner – the lovely Marie, whose violin has a symbol that Raphael feels is linked to his dad's whereabouts – her accent is far less irritating than Luke's.

Granted, we're comparing oranges and tangerines here: the only Layton games in the UK to date have been on the DS and we've no doubt the first 3DS game, *Professor Layton And The Mask Of Miracle*, will raise its game significantly. For now though, in terms of overall presentation, Rhythm Thief And The Emperor's Treasure blows Professor Layton clean out of the water.



The cutscene where Raphael meets Marie is nothing short of 3D bliss.

Bag Of Rhythm

Of course, all this is just the side salad – it's the real meat of both games that's very different. While the Layton series is all about puzzling, *Rhythm Thief* is all about music. Sure, it has a couple of puzzles tucked away in there, but none of them is going to cause your brain too much trouble. Instead, it features 50 or so rhythm mini-games that appear at certain times throughout the story, each of which comes with its very own toe-tapping beat.

The music is superb throughout. For once the Sound Test is actually useful.

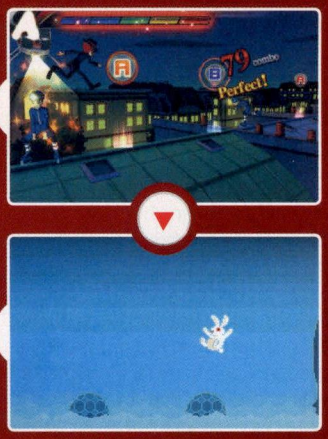
These mini-games are split into different types, each paying tribute to past rhythm games. Some will have you tapping and sliding the stylus to the beat as you dance in a style similar to that of *Elite Beat Agents*, while others ask you to tap a button to perform repeated actions as in *Rhythm Paradise*. There's even a *Guitar Hero*-like section in which you play a violin.

Long-time Sega fans will remember that the company had its own fingers in the rhythm action pie a while back and tribute is also paid to these in the form of mini-games based on *Samba De Amigo* and *Space Channel 5* also featuring (with the latter's famous "up, down, up, down, chu-chu-chu" sequence replicated perfectly, bringing a smile to our face). They're little touches that newer gamers won't notice, but those who've loved Sega since the Dreamcast days will greatly appreciate.

There are around 50 of these mini-games, but that doesn't mean they're all completely different and some types are repeated throughout the game. In all, there are only around 20 different types of mini-game, so you'll be hiding to avoid guards, hopping from platform to platform and fighting

Music Makes The Titles Come Together

Many of *Rhythm Thief*'s missions are based on past games. Here are just some examples



Le Getaway

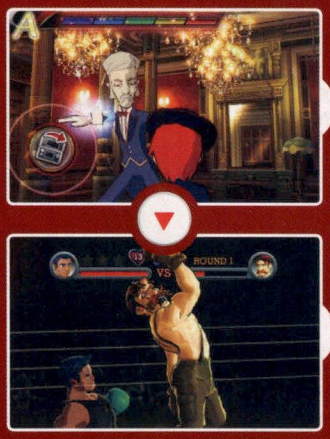
From time to time you'll be pressing buttons to the beat to jump and slide over and under enemies and obstacles. These sections are reminiscent of some of the *Rhythm Paradise* mini-games, such as the rabbit-jumping one from the original Japanese GBA title.

Moon Princess

This lovely mission has you playing the violin to trigger a secret in the cathedral. While the gameplay is a simple case of sliding left and right on the stylus at the right point, the highway and the way the notes come down are clearly based on the system developed for *Guitar Hero*.

Samba Carnival

Shun Nakamura, the director of *Rhythm Thief And The Emperors's Treasure*, was also responsible for classic Sega rhythm game *Samba De Amigo*. It's no surprise, then, that *Rhythm Thief* features a Samba-based mission in which you press buttons to shake your maracas.



Throwdown With Alfred

This boss battle has you tilting the 3DS left, right and forward to dodge Alfred's attacks when he swings at you. The timing is very similar to that of *Punch-Out!!*, which also has you dodging left and right before delivering your killer blow.

"Everything drips class: the music, the cutscenes... all are phenomenal"

Napoleon's soldiers more than once before the main story ends. Naturally, each time is harder than the last, and each takes place in a different location with a different tune and background.

Thief Encounter

What makes *Rhythm Thief And The Emperor's Treasure* so impressive is that it would have been decent had it been just a collection of mini-games. The music is sensational, the art style is lovely and the addition of a 'hard' difficulty later on means it'll take you an awfully long time to get an A rating on every single mission.

This would have been enough for most people – after all, *Elite Beat Agents* only featured 19 different songs and nobody who bought that game regretted it. But the really impressive thing about the game is that there's also a great story in there – one that will only take you around six hours or so to play through and that is charming and genuinely interesting.

Why has Napoleon come back to life? Will Raphael and Marie get together? Just what is the story behind Raphael's dad? These are questions to which you genuinely want to know the answer and which will keep you playing, much like the Layton games do.

There's still more to do once you finish the game as well, with extra story sections available when you finish the game's two larger tasks, the Master Instrument and the Master Notes. The Master Instrument is a special device that you build by bringing certain sounds to a craftsman in a small shop.

You get these sounds by tapping various objects throughout Paris and, with 60 sounds in total, it'll take you a while to find them all. Meanwhile, the Master Notes are 18 sets of magical musical notes that are also hidden on certain screens. Find them all for a diverting extra subplot.

When all that's done, there's still the option to play through each mini-game on a harder difficulty setting and unlock four special Marathon versions of certain games, which are high score challenges that last for as long as it takes you to mess up three times.

We adore this game. The main story is a little short, but so's Scarlett Johansson and everyone seems to like her. In all, if you're good at rhythm games you're probably looking at 10 hours in total to complete everything with A rankings and that's the only actual real issue we have with *Rhythm Thief*.

Everything else is just dripping with class – the music, the cutscenes: all phenomenal. As long as you're the type who doesn't mind replaying games when you finish them, this is well worth your money.

+ Chris Scullion

Just as well he's standing there, otherwise you'd have seen... well.

This flying mission is easily the weakest and most frustrating of the bunch, but thankfully it only turns up once in the game.

Verdict | Nintendo

A brilliant adventure whose shortness is its only drawback. Well worth a look.

88%

WiiWare

Read me
- **Publisher** Capcom
- **Developer** Capcom
- **Multiplayer** No
- **Release** Out Now
- **Price** 800 Points
- **In a word** Ridiculous

Strider

A hilariously peculiar platformer

Just moments before this was a load of Russian politicians. Really.

Strider **looks awful. Hiryu, your main man who is charged with assassinating a dictator called the** Grandmaster, walks up slopes like he's tap dancing and the action is jerkier than the Reggae Reggae sauce factory.

So why by the end of the first level might you find yourself enjoying this bizarre Mega Drive action platformer? Is it because hero Hiryu does a hilarious cartwheel every time he jumps, or maybe because at the end of the first of five stages he walks into what looks like a senate meeting only for the politicians to transform into some sort of centipede?

The action doesn't let up, as you're chased by wolves and face a giant robot gorilla and by the time you're using your plasma sword to take out an Amazonian lady who is riding a triceratops in the jungle, it's possible you'll be laughing so much, you'll be completely won over.

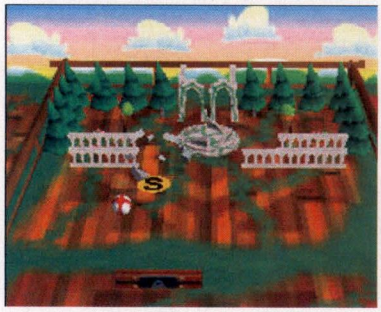
Whether you'll be laughing with or at *Strider* is debatable, but it is entertaining while it lasts, even if it is showing its age. You wouldn't spend your last fiver on it, but fans of the original will enjoy this.

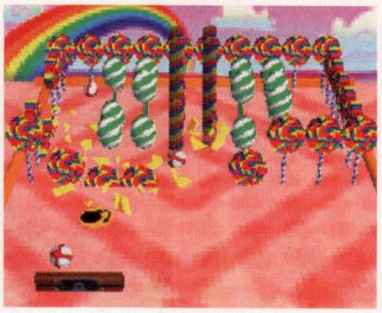
+Tom East

Nintendo **70%**

If you liked the Mega Drive game, you'll enjoy this.

Strider is saved by its gleefully full-on absurdity.



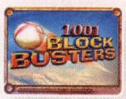


This puzzler gets surprisingly intense when the blocks start piling up.

1001 Blockbusters

Breakout has gone all 3D on us

Nintendo eShop



Read me
- **Publisher** Teyon
- **Developer** Selectsoft
- **Multiplayer** No
- **Release** Out Now
- **Price** £1.80
- **In a word** Breakout

Do we need another *Breakout*? Since the bat and ball original, we've played *Arkanoid*, *Alleyway* and even Kirby has got in on the act, destroying bricks in style in *Kirby Block Ball*. Like the latter, *1001 Blockbusters* puts a new twist on the genre. This time you're not destroying 2D blocks of bricks, but smashing down 3D castles and Greek temples. In addition to hitting pillars and towers with balls, you can shoot them down when you acquire power-ups such as cannons and lasers.

It's a nice idea and could have worked really well on 3DS. On DSi it looks really poor, while the music sounds like the sort of thing you'd hear when put on hold.

With 1,001 levels for £1.80 Teyon has been generous, but with more finesse, this could have been very good.

+Tom East

Nintendo **54%**

Blockbusters is a lot of game for not much money, but still disappoints.

Battle Of The Elements

Puzzle fans will be in their element

Nintendo eShop

Read me
- **Publisher** Undercoders
- **Developer** EnjoyUp
- **Multiplayer** 1-2
- **Release** Out Now
- **Price** £4.70
- **In a word** Blocky

Battle Of The Elements **is a block puzzler with a difference. The fact that you have to make combos of the same-coloured blocks is nothing new** but the way it is executed is. Holding your DS on its side, you swipe the stylus to bring down blocks from the pack, before swiping again to send them back up the screen.

Unlike *Bust-A-Move*, it's not as simple as matching three blocks of the same colour. Each of the four different-coloured blocks represents an element and by bringing one of each to the bottom of the screen, you'll create a super-element. You then need to fire this at the elements of the same colour.

It's far harder to explain than it is to play and gets surprisingly tense when your blocks start filling up the screen. It's very good indeed.

+Tom East

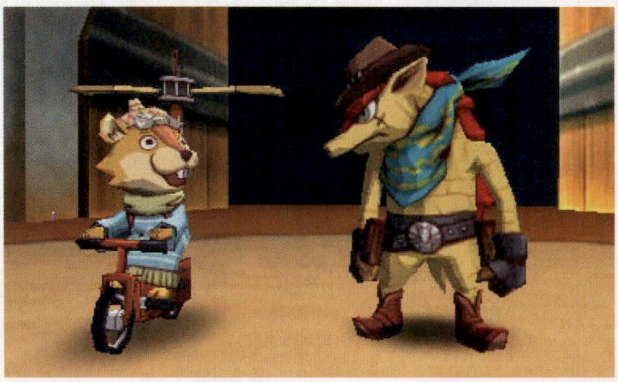
Nintendo **78%**

Nintendo eShop

Read me
- **Publisher** Nintendo
- **Developer** Vanpool
- **Multiplayer** No
- **Release** Out now
- **Price** £9
- **In a word** Unique

Dillon's Rolling Western

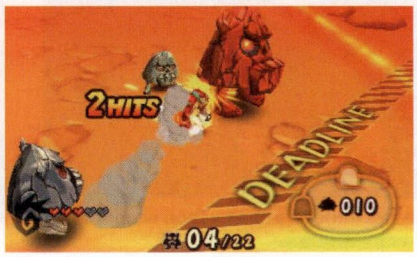
Tower defence is the new grock'n'roll, if this highly entertaining title is anything to go by



Few tower defence games have half as much charm.

The trick is not to let the scrog-eating grocks into the village.

You can take it from us: this guy here is absolutely rock hard.



Everyone is talking about *Dillon's Rolling Western*, not because it stars Nintendo's coolest hero since Olimar or because it's a game that puts the fun back into tower defence. It's because it costs £9. Your money gets you 10 villages to defend from walking rocks called grocks; how long this will take depends on how good you are at tower defence games.

Dillon's Rolling Western is challenging, with few tips on which towers you should equip with guns, or whether you should build wooden or iron towers. All you are told is to collect scruffles from the fields in order to increase the number of scrogs, the creatures who live in the village. If the grocks invade the village and eat all the scrogs, it's game over.

This game takes the potentially dry genre of tower defence and packs it with charm and character and makes it accessible to all. Admittedly, you're doing pretty much the same thing for hours on end, but there are far worse things than rolling around the Wild West as an armadillo, as you do here.

A multiplayer mode would have been nice , but you'd probably have to pay a bit more than £9 for that. As it is, *Dillon's Rolling Western* is great fun and it's hard to think of another game like it.

+ Tom East

Nintendo **87%**

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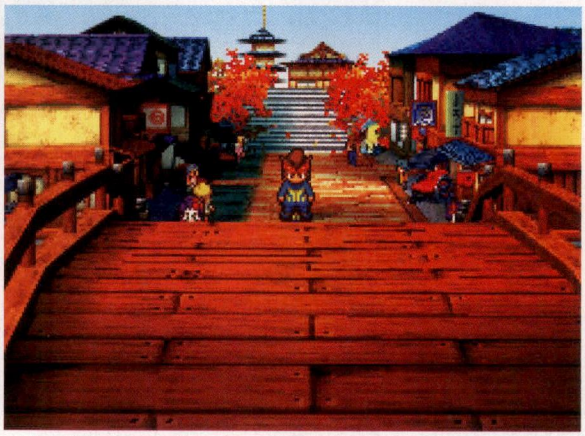
He's good at getting his fellow players motivated, that lad. Good on him, we say.

Raimon Eleven weren't sympathetic to Glasgow Rangers' administration woes.

The purple cone shows the possible range of your player's shot.

It's called that because he hits it so hard it smashes through a nearby shop window.



Some of the environments look great, considering this is a DS game.

NINTENDO DS

Read me

- **Publisher** Nintendo
- **Developer** Level-5
- **Multiplayer** 1-2
- **Release** Out now
- **Price** £29.99
- **In a word** Familiar

Inazuma Eleven 2

Are you Inazuma Eleven 1 in disguise?

Well, they didn't hang about with this one, did they? It was only seven months ago that we were singing the praises of *Inazuma Eleven*, Level-5's football RPG. Since then, it seems that Nintendo's localisation teams have been working overtime, because now here we are with the sequel already.

Of course, it's worth bearing in mind that in Japan it took more than a year for *Inazuma 2* to be released, so don't let the short turnaround time here fool you into thinking this was any sort of rush job. If anything, in fact, *Inazuma 2* is even longer than its predecessor.

Set just a week after the events of the first game, *Inazuma Eleven 2* sees Mark and the rest of Raimon Eleven meeting up again to resume training. Things don't go quite as planned, however, when they hear a large bang at their school that turns out to be an explosion caused by aliens from the interplanetary Alius Academy who want to use football to destroy the world. You can add your own joke about Joey Barton here; our lawyers have advised we probably shouldn't.

It's up to Raimon Eleven, then, to beat Alius, quite literally, at their own game, but before that they'll need to go on a recruitment drive across the whole of Japan in search of the finest players available to humanity.

Back To Basics

Anyone who's played the original *Inazuma Eleven* will be either delighted or disappointed (depending on taste) to know that the sequel's core is much the same as the original's, with changes few and far between.

Obviously, it's a completely new story, with new locations, characters and special moves, but it's not an upgrade in the sense that stepping up a generation in the Pokémon series is. Everything else, including the football system, remains mainly unchanged. It's as if the original game just continued on for another 30-40 hours after you finished it (not before returning all your characters' stats to Lv 1 though, of course). This is no bad thing, mind you, because the first *Inazuma Eleven* was excellent.

For those new to the series, this means *Inazuma Eleven 2* still has a great football-based battle system, where you use the stylus to pass the ball and move players across the screen while using players' abilities, stats and a bit of luck to dodge tackles, steal the ball and take shots. It can take a while to get used to

The game has a sub-plot featuring Axel and his sick sister. Fret not, she's alright.

Best way to play...

The Exploration sections can be played using either the D-Pad or the touchscreen, while the football sections use both.

Cheer Up Raimon Eleven, Oh What Can It Mean

The football-tastic *Inazuma Eleven 2* plot explained via the medium of screenshots

We Are The Champions

Huzzah! Raimon Eleven are the greatest team in Japan. Next: to become the best in the world...

Purple Daze

While training for the first time since winning the cup, the team see a huge purple blast heading for their school. Worried, they leg it over there.

That's Ruined It

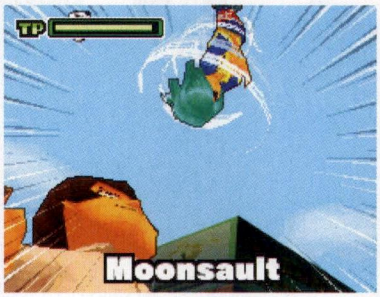
The school has been trashed by a strange group. After brainwashing some pupils, the odd band vanishes when Raimon Eleven approach them.

Aliens Vs (Adidas) Predator

Aliens are bent on destroying the world with football! Can Raimon Eleven's silky skills save the day?

There he goes motivating again. Give it a rest, Mark.

Well that's certainly one way of doing things, the old 1-1-1 formation. Good luck.



So apparently this isn't football now, it's WWE.

"The things that you loved and hated about the first game are more or less directly replicated in the second"

how it works and the game does your confidence no favours by putting you in a match that's rigged to make you lose early on in order to progress the story, causing many newcomers to wonder what it is they're doing wrong and why every absolutely decision seems to go against them.

Stick with it, though and eventually you get into the swing of things, planning your own ingenious tactics on the fly and identifying the players around whom you'll want to build attacks.

The exploration sections feature a handy map screen showing where to go.

There's Only Two Inazumas

The main addition to *Inazuma Eleven 2* is its decision to go down the Pokémon route and stretch the new title across two separate editions, *Firestorm* and *Blizzard*. Much like Pokémon, the differences between the two are pretty minimal, with only very slight tweaks to the story to separate them – Mark will become closer to a different girl, depending on which version you play, with that girl then able to join the team – and certain version-exclusive players can only be recruited in specific versions.

The latter may seem like a big deal, but with an absolutely massive 1,500 possible players to recruit throughout the game, it's not as though you're missing out on any Pokémon-style attempts to catch every one of them.

Fans of the first *Inazuma Eleven* will be chuffed to bits with this sequel because it's very much a product of the 'if it ain't broke don't fix it' philosophy.

The things you loved and hated about the first game are more or less directly replicated in the second, so it's more a continuation of the story than an evolution of the gameplay.

It's worth bearing in mind, though, that *Inazuma 2* assumes you've already played through the first game and that you know all the characters already, so if you're new to the series it would be best to hunt down a copy of the original first.

+ Chris Scullion

Verdict

Nintendo

More of the same, which is no bad thing. If you loved the first, you'll love this, too.

86%

A Brief History Of...

Monolith Soft

The story behind the rise of Nintendo's new first-party favourite

There's nothing wrong with playing to your strengths. That Monolith Soft's staff includes former employees of Square who worked on the likes of *Chrono Trigger*, *Final Fantasy VI* and *Secret Of Mana* perhaps explains why it has chosen to operate almost exclusively within a single genre. Given the studio's imposing name, it's apt that it is known for monumental JRPGs: towering tributes to a style of game that many suggest is outmoded, but which has proven a rich source of creative success for this particular developer. Indeed, in July of 2011 it announced that it was opening up a new studio in Kyoto, a sign of Nintendo's faith in its new acquisition.

For a long time, Monolith Soft was the property of Namco. In 1999, the publisher invested heavily in this new start-up formed by Hirohide Sugiura, a Square producer who wanted a fresh challenge. Namco owned a massive 96 per cent stake in the company until selling most of its shares to Nintendo in 2007. Nintendo then bought out Namco's share completely, giving Monolith a place at its top table of developers. And why not? After all, with the incredible *Xenoblade Chronicles*, it made the finest RPG in years, not just on Wii but on any format.

Freudian Slick

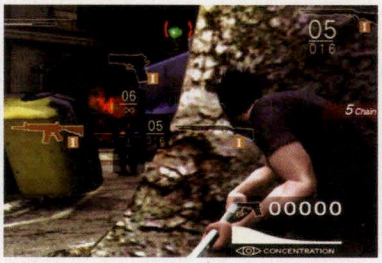
Still, while *Xenoblade* is the studio's best game, it's not as if it came from nowhere. Before then, it was best known for *Xenogears*, which was a dark, complex and thematically risky PlayStation RPG, influenced philosophically by the psychoanalytical works of Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud. Flawed, but fascinating, it is routinely regarded as one of the best role-players of the era, though its combat mechanics owed much to the Active Time Battle system of the games director Tetsuya Takahashi had worked on at Square during his time there as a graphic artist. There then followed three games in four years. Released between 2002 and 2006 for the PlayStation 2, the

> "JRPGs have been a rich source of creative success for Monolith"

"Rich, colourful worlds are one of Monolith's strengths"

Xenoblade has some of the most exciting worlds we've explored.

Baten Kaitos's battle system is still fairly unique – we'd like to see a 3DS version.



Disaster: Day Of Crisis starred the unlucky action-man Raymond Bryce.

Xenosaga's story was originally set to span three consoles over a decade.

"Xenosaga's Nietzsche-influenced narrative was too indulgent for some"

Takahashi-conceived Xenosaga trilogy proved more divisive, with some finding its Nietzsche-influenced narrative too pretentious and indulgent. The sci-fi series was initially intended to run for six games, but it was curtailed after the third, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, the title of which came from Nietzsche's parable on the death of God and the rise of the *Übermensch*. Little wonder it proved a tough sell, particularly outside Japan.

Card Sharp

Between those three releases, Monolith decided it needed something a little more accessible, but that didn't hamstring its desire to innovate. While one team worked on Xenosaga, another was busy with *Baten Kaitos: Eternal Wings And The Lost Ocean*. Co-developed with tri-Crescendo – more recently responsible for *Fragile Dreams: Farewell Ruins Of The Moon* – it had an unusual central idea, with the player controlling the guardian spirit of the game's protagonist, a winged hero named Kalas.

Though its English-language translation left much to be desired, with some sloppy dialogue and woeful voice acting (though some would argue that it added to the game's charm), it featured an inventive battling system in a rich, colourful world which *Xenoblade* players will no doubt agree is an evident Monolith strength. Though still indulgent in places, with lengthy cutscenes and screeds of dialogue, it was still a fine RPG and its card-based battling system proved surprisingly tactical despite a strong element of luck involved in the early stages. A further neat touch saw cards age and decay or develop over time, forcing players to carefully consider when to use them.

That was succeeded by the prequel, *Baten Kaitos Origins*, which was released in 2006 to an even warmer critical reception. It packed in superior storytelling and a revamped version of the original's battle system, which streamlined the original's convoluted systems so that all characters would draw from the same deck. This emphasised speed and simple number combinations while offering the player more flexibility to store and combine key items on empty cards. It's less complex than it sounds.

While the first game was a little too reliant on the luck of the draw, *Origins* evolved into a game of skill rather than chance, the cards proving less capricious when the player had more control.

Origins came out in the later stages of the GameCube's life, and with the first

On The Shoulders Of Giants

The monumental talent of Monolith Soft

Koh Kojima

Koh Kojima worked on the successful Xenosaga games before graduating to the role of lead writer on *Baten Kaitos: Origins*. He then contributed significantly to the development of *Disaster: Day Of Crisis* before going on to direct the awesome, genre-redefining *Xenoblade Chronicles* alongside Monolith Soft's vastly experienced creative main-man, Tetsuya Takahashi (see right).

Tetsuya Takahashi

Acknowledged as one of the two biggest creative forces at the company, Tetsuya Takahashi's legacy at Square included contributing some of the spectacular graphics that would light up *Front Mission* and *Final Fantasy V* among other high-profile titles during his time at the studio, before turning his considerable talents to writing and directing when he joined Monolith Soft.

Yasuyuki Honne

Yasuyuki Honne worked as an artist at Square under the wing of Tetsuya Takahashi (see left), who would go on to encourage him to join Monolith Soft after finishing the sterling work he'd applied to cult PS1 game *Chrono Cross*. He directed both titles in the Baten Kaitos games and made a model of the Bionis series, Mechonis, when the studio first pitched *Xenoblade Chronicles* to Nintendo.

Yasunori Mitsuda

Chrono Trigger co-composer Yasunori Mitsuda has helped to produced many stirring soundtracks for Monolith Soft, including *Xenogears*, *Xenosaga Episode I: Der Wille Sur Macht*, and *Soma Bringer*. *Xenoblade Chronicles* was another successful collaborative effort, with Mitsuda's themes joining those of Manami Kiyota and the prolific Yoko Shimomura to spine-tingling effect.

We'd love to see Raymond Bryce return. The Wii U would have the power to render nature's weapons of mass destruction all the better.

Xenoblade's expansive environments push Wii to its limits, so we're itching to see what Monolith Soft can produce on Wii U and 3DS.

The much-overlooked *Baten Kaitos* hinted at the greatness to come.

game having enjoyed middling sales, Nintendo of Europe evidently didn't think such a substantial localisation effort was worth the expense. Still, it's well worth hunting down if you have a GameCube or Wii console that can play US games, as certain strands of *Xenoblade*'s DNA can be found here. Monolith has hinted that it may return to the franchise in future – it is currently recruiting for a mystery new 3DS game, so perhaps a Baten Kaitos 3D is in the offing. We can dream.

Another Monolith Soft game that went missing in action outside Japan was *Soma Bringer* for DS, though there has since been a fan translation into English, such was its popularity with Japanese-speaking importers – or those prepared to struggle past the walls of kanji.

Typically forward-thinking and experimental with a fluid battle system and some excellent, friendly AI, it was nevertheless a victim of its own lofty ambitions, with a steep learning curve that managed to put off all but the hardcore RPG audience.

Disastrous Results

Next, Monolith Soft tried its hand at something very different. *Disaster: Day Of Crisis* blended the third-person exploration and survival elements of Irem's cult Disaster Report games with spectacular action sequences and motion-based mini-games. The permanently unlucky Raymond Bryce suffered his worst day ever, driving away from tsunamis, surviving earthquakes and fires, fighting off terrorist threats and even a rampaging bear.

> "Xenoblade Chronicles was close to being 2011's best Wii game"

Sensibly split into bite-sized sequences that helped the game to maintain a cracking pace, it was varied enough to compensate for its mechanical weaknesses. With a stirring score and some wonderfully naïve dialogue filled with mild profanity, it was a clear attempt to appeal to an American audience that nevertheless couldn't have felt more Japanese. In fact, Nintendo of America didn't like it at all – Reggie declared himself unimpressed with the game, and so it never earned a Stateside release.

In the meantime, Takahashi had decided he wanted to return to what he knew best, while conceding that the indulgent cutscenes upon which his previous games had been so reliant weren't necessarily the best way to tell a story. What followed was the studio's best game. We've written plenty about *Xenoblade Chronicles* in recent months, but it's increasingly obvious that it's the quintessential Monolith Soft game, with a beautiful, expansive world, gripping story and inventive battle mechanics. It's a refinement of everything this team has been striving towards in the past 13 years. That it came close to beating *Skyward Sword* as the best Wii game of last year speaks volumes of its quality.

Yet by June it will have been two years since work finished on Takahashi's masterpiece, which suggests that we won't have too long to wait to hear about the studio's next project. Despite the confirmation that Monolith Soft is working on a 3DS game, given its recent expansion, we'd be surprised if that was the only project currently in the offing.

Either way, it'll probably take its sweet time to journey westward – which would seem to rule out a Wii U launch title – but whatever comes next for Monolith Soft, there is overwhelming evidence that it will be worth the wait. ✚

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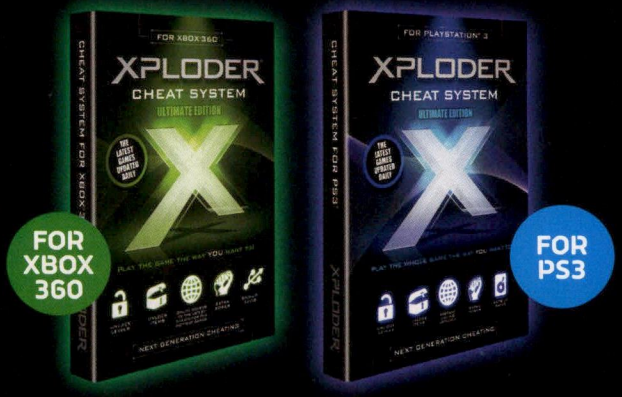

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Edited by Chris Scullion

Your essential guide to Nintendo gaming

"Elena has fully transformed into a whisk" Ten (made-up) ***Pandora's Tower*** **plots** Page 130

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- **In a word** Armed

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Chapter 1

The Return of Palutena

Short and sweet, chapter one will ease you in

> "Move in wide circles to easily dodge most attacks"

Kid Icarus Fact

Powers
As you discover new powers you unlock pieces of a larger picture.

1 Let's Get Dizzy

The first chapter's flying section is a cinch. Move in wide circles and you'll easily dodge most attacks. Once you're above the ground, look out for the treasure fish carrying a Happy Trigger. This will charge your shots instantly, so let off the trigger and tap when the reticle changes to fire off consecutive, powerful charge shots.

2 Rear Admiral

Use the grenade to take out the Shemum-spawning vase. To the right of the courtyard is a level 5 intensity gate, behind which lives a giant tank enemy. Strike his weak point at the back, while also dealing with incoming attacks. There's a food reward and a treasure chest containing a new power or a new weapon.

3 Twinbellow Blows

If playing above intensity level 5, expect a tougher Twinbellows fight. His charge attack is the one to look out for. Just watch his movements – he'll crouch down before he charges – and you'll have fair warning of his upcoming attacks. Ranged attacks work best, allowing plenty of time to anticipate Twinbellows' attacks.

Chapter 2

Magnus and the Dark Lord

The second chapter introduces a human touch

Kid Icarus Fact

Treasure Hint
Save Treasure Hunt feathers until you really need them!

1 Bolt From The Blue

Look out for a Souflee during the opening flying section. He'll appear for a brief moment before darting between some lightning bolts. Kill him for a load of hearts and, once underground, look out for a treasure fish carrying a Happy Trigger. This is needed on higher intensities, as this section is far more treacherous than that of the previous chapter.

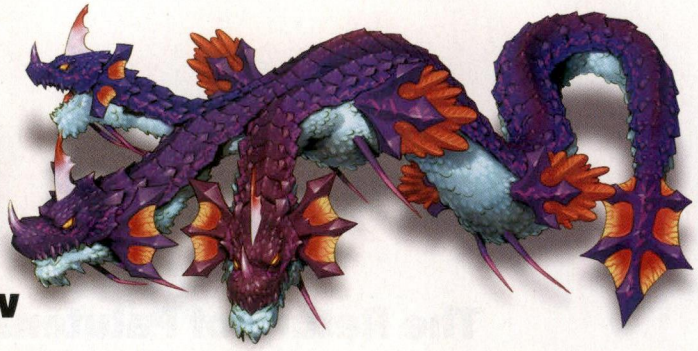
2 Behind The Curtain

Just before you meet Magnus you'll enter a descending corridor. Walk through the tapestry on the right. On the other side is a portal to a Zodiac room containing one of the 12 Zodiac weapons. This is the powerful Sagittarius Bow, which should serve you well for at least a couple more chapters. Fuse it or grind it into hearts once it's no longer useful to you.

3 Lordy Lordy

Defeating the Dark Lord takes some doing on higher intensities, as he'll be a bit more fleet of foot. Watch out for his black holes, which will suck Pit towards them and take huge chunks off your health bar. Sprint away to shake their gravitational pull. His other attacks are straightforward to dodge. Take care of minions and don't melée for too long or he'll counter.

Chapter 3



Heads of the Hewdraw

A three-way triumph in the third chapter

1 Immediate Payoff

Shortly after you land in the besieged town, you'll come across a level 4 intensity gate that leads back to the on-foot section's opening area. Before dropping off the ledge, turn to the right to find a treasure chest containing a new weapon. A rather dopey Souflee will appear behind you too, so melée its stupid face off to land some sweet heartage.

2 Round The Houses

Just after you defeat the two Metroids and dodge the flippy panel thing, you'll come across a collection of houses with a sequence of jump pads on their roofs. Stay on the ground, running around the back of the farthest house to discover a treasure chest with a nice weapon in it. Then use the grenade on the rooftop to destroy the next vase you see.

3 Seventh Heaven

Once Palutena's doused you in monster pheromones, one of the three Hewdraw heads will appear. The head you get depends on the order in which you smote them. Once defeated, you'll find a level 7 intensity gate on the opposite side. Through it is a rare treasure chest, but don't expect to get to it without a fight. There's some food just outside the gate. Save it for later.

Kid Icarus Fact

Online

Play Light vs Dark online. Even if you lose you'll earn weapons and powers.

Chapter 4

The Reaper's Line of Sight

The fourth chapter will test your stealth skills

1 Boulder Dash

After you defeat the first Shelbo (giant snail-like vacuum dude) in this chapter's on-foot section, a grind rail will appear. Ignore it and go right, where you'll see a large boulder. Smack it up a bit to destroy it and reveal a hidden room. Melée the stone ball inside to knock it off a ledge and turn 180° to attack a Souflee. You can pop into the second room if you're low on health, but watch out for the Orne.

2 Mates Crates

The courtyard you land in after that first grind rail ride is riddled with troops. Before you arrive, activate a power or two (poison effect and similar powers are useful in big fights). Once cleared, enter the far door to find a room littered with crates. Avoid the Zuree enemies, and find a secret corridor. Inside the corridor is a secret chest. Watch out for a Souflee waiting behind the next door.

3 Hole In One

Tada! Because you tipped that boulder over the ledge in the hidden room earlier, you'll now be able to access the treasure chest in this room. It's still a perilous path though, watch out for the moving wall, it'll push you into the room below. If you do fall, there's a jump pad in the corner of the room to propel you back into the action. Time your sprint carefully and that sneaky treasure chest is all yours.

Kid Icarus Fact

Heart Attack

You'll find hearts in chests. So be sure to check every nook.

Chapter 5

Pandora's Labyrinth of Deceit

Don't lose your bearings in the game's fifth chapter

Kid Icarus Fact

Fuse It
Fused weapons don't always result in a better weapon. Pay attention.

1 Flee, My Pretties

During the flying section you choose which direction to take by veering in that direction. It barely matters which way you go, as one leads to a dead end that turns you around and spits down the other path. But, if you're trying to set a good time, the correct path is left and then right. After the second diverging path, watch out for an extremely quick Souflee scurrying up a wall. He's a fast one.

2 Castle Of Illusion

When you find yourself in the hall with five doors to choose from, four of them are tricksy ones. Running through door four will spit you back out of door five, for example. And door three simply smacks you in the face. Door two is the one you want to head through. Though the room it leads to is identical, each door leads somewhere else. Check door four for food, and head through door two to proceed.

3 On Yer Bike

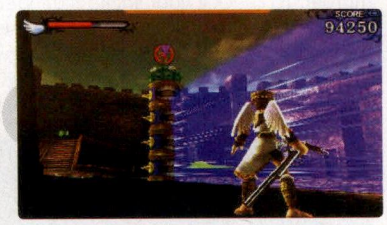
The second time you encounter the Exo Tank on Pandora's racetrack, race one full lap before a ramp leading to the exit appears. Ignore the ramp and go round for a second lap. You should see a cheeky Souflee racing around the track with you. Catch him by using carefully timed speed boosts during the straighter sections of the track and fire your guns when you get close enough to take him out.

General Tips

> "To dodge, slam the circle pad to one side"

Top tips for hip Pits

Tactical guidance for the new player



Kid Icarus Fact

Icons
You can arrange and move icons around the top screen using the face buttons.

1 Get Outta Dodge

It takes a while to get used to how Pit dodges attacks, but once you get the hang of it, it's a valuable tool. To dodge, slam the circle pad to one side when an attack or projectile is near. It doesn't matter if you slam in the direction of the attack, because Pit will turn blue and temporarily invincible while he dodges. This is how you avoid getting hit by sweeping attacks like the above laser field.

2 Grow A Pair

If you want to discover some beefier weapons, you have to start playing on higher intensities. Fusing weapons will increase their value and strength, but only to a certain point, and while you can find some powerful weapons in the store, they'll usually cost an arm and a leg. When the game pushes you to a higher difficulty setting, take the chance – the penalty for dying isn't a bad as it first seems.

3 Gotta Catch Em All

The Icon Transformation power is one you should keep with you at all times. It turns any sufficiently weakened enemy into an Icon, allowing you to add them to your collection. You must reduce an enemy's health to near-zero before the power will work, but when it does it's immensely satisfying and saves you wasting Play Coins and eggs in the Icon Toss mini-game. ✚

- **Publisher** Konami
- **Developer** Kojima Productions
- **Multiplayer** No
- **Price** £39.99
- **In a word** Arboreal

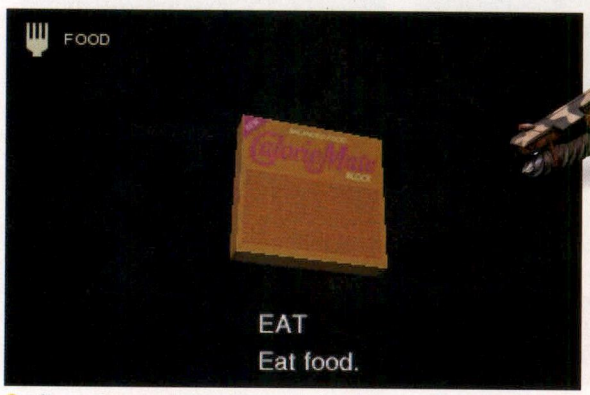
Get more from...

Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D

Welcome to the jungle, we've got loads of tips

1 Spoilt Rotten

Remember reaching into the back of your fridge and pulling out a hairy mound of brown sludge that was once a fish finger sandwich? Well, it's an image that you'd do well to remember when playing *Snake Eater 3D*, as most food you pick up will go rotten in your backpack if left for too long. You can avoid this by tranquilising animals rather than killing them. Rotten food will have little flies over their icons, but it's not completely useless – if you destroy a guard supply depot they'll eat any rotten food you leave lying around, causing them to fall ill and pass out. Which is handy.



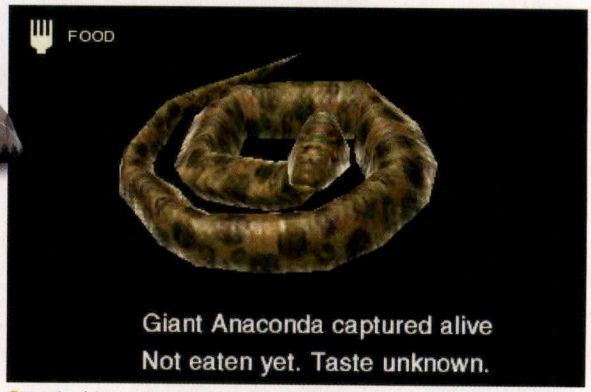
Of course, some foodstuffs are less likely to rot than others. Doesn't mean they're going to taste much better, mind you.

Snake Fact

Kingly The King Cobra is the world's largest poisonous snake.

2 Shoot That Poison Arrow

If you want to conserve ammunition, pay close attention to the items you can equip as weapons. Some of them will surprise you. Tranquilise and cage a poisonous snake, for example, and you can throw it at a guard for a natural murder. To check if your snake is dangerous, capture it and give Para-Medic a call on the codec. She'll let you know if it's poisonous or not. Guards usually kill anything you throw at them, so not only will you have dealt with the enemy, you'll also be left with a nice snack for afterwards.



Snake (the main character, that is) has a funny obsession with how animals taste. Call Para-Medic for loads of culinary advice.

3 Camo-camo-camo-camo-camo-chameleon

Make your own camouflage using the 3DS camera, it's simple!

Look Around You

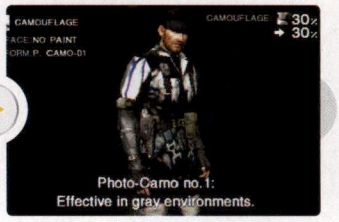
Identify your surroundings first. Chances are they'll be brown. Or green. Or a sort of browny green. Or green with brown bits.

Snap Happy

Go into the Survival Viewer to swap your camouflage. The option to create Photo-Camo is here. Use the home menu to load the camera.

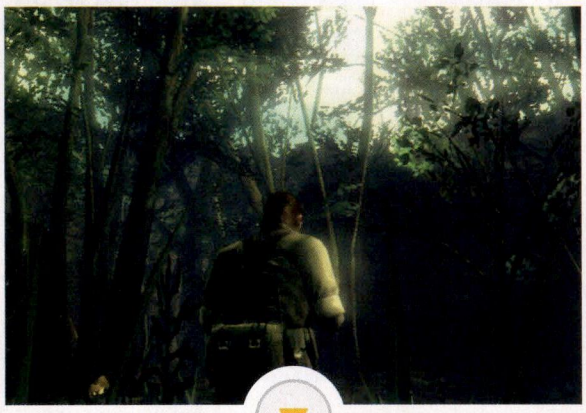
Shutter Island

Find something nearby that closely matches the scenery you're trying to blend into. Grass works well, as does dirt. Dirty grass is your best bet.



Can You See Me?

Save your custom camouflage, head back into the game and try it out. The Camo Index in the corner of the screen tells you if it's working.



Sensors will chew through your batteries. Eat luminous mushrooms to recharge them, or just wait around for a bit.

4 View To A Kill

The 3DS version of *Snake Eater* adds the extremely useful map on the bottom screen, but to get a better idea of where enemies are patrolling use one of the handful of available sensors. Each has its drawbacks: the AP Sensor emits a beep depending on how close another human is to Snake, the Active Sonar allows you to send out a 'pulse' which will reveal the locations of any guards or animals around you, and the Motion Sensor highlights any moving objects on your map. Only the AP Sensor works during the Alert Phase, as radio jamming renders the others inoperable.

"Guards usually kill anything you throw at them, giving you a handy snack too"

Snake closes one eye while using the iron sights, so the 3DS automatically switches into 2D mode. Clever bobbins.

Snake Fact

Special
There are around 3,000 known species of snake. Can you name them all?

5 Got The Shakes

You can use the Circle Pad Pro for additional camera control, but it comes at a price. Using the second circle pad means you'll experience shakey hands while aiming. You can reduce this shakiness and improve accuracy by keeping your stamina up (that is, keep scoffing rabbits and frogs and snakes), by crouching, going prone, or by acquiring special camouflage. While aiming, an option on the bottom screen allows you flip between first and third person aiming modes. Try these to see which feels better. There's an auto-aim option for taking things easy.

3DS Essentials

Here's what to buy now on the high street and on eShop

Top Games

Kid Icarus Uprising

From the mind behind Super Smash Bros. comes this similarly generous action extravaganza, packed to the brim with weaponry and designed for repeat playthroughs. Superb.

If it's oddballs you're after, try *Kid Icarus Uprising*.

Bit.Trip Saga

A compilation of five excellent Bit.Trip games (plus one average one), each offering cool retro visuals and sound. Each is based around a simple but addictive gameplay concept. A great value for money package.

Super Mario 3D Land

Finally, a true 3D Mario platformer comes to 3DS. Suitable for beginners and experts, it might not be the most innovative Mario game ever made, but it's still utterly charming.

Star Fox 64 3D

The Nintendo 64 masterpiece comes to Nintendo 3DS in spectacular style, with surprisingly intuitive gyro controls, newly polished visuals and a great multiplayer mode. Another superb remake.

The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time 3D

One of the greatest games ever made now looks even prettier, has a better control system and can be played on the move. If you have a 3DS, you need this game.

Super Street Fighter IV: 3D Edition

The best fighter ever is recreated near perfectly on 3DS, with all the modes from the HD console versions, Figure Collecting and a nifty over-shoulder view.

Nintendogs + Cats

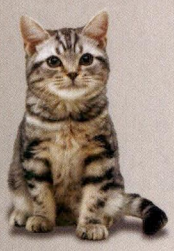
One of the cutest games ever, *Nintendogs* was a hit in the early DS days. This sequel has had a similar impact on the 3DS. AR and StreetPass capability are the very pleasant cherries on top.

Ridge Racer 3D

Finally, a proper entry on a Nintendo platform for the classic racer, with hours of gameplay, a great set of tracks and classic music. The only thing missing here is an online option.

Dead Or Alive: Dimensions

Team Ninja's bombastic, curvy fighter threatens to steal *Super Street Fighter IV: 3D*'s crown. In fact, it even manages to supersede Capcom's fighter completely in some regards.



Buy *Nintendogs + Cats* or this kitty gets it. Seriously.

Resident Evil: Mercenaries 3D

This action-packed series spin-off offers top-quality Resi action without any distractions such as a plot or puzzles. Perfect for a quick blast and has great one-more-go appeal.

Your Shout

The hottest gaming chat on the **ONM** forum this month

Big Toby "I've never played the game before and was really impressed with the ambient sound effects and the 3D was amazing. That bit on the bridge, however, was just nonsense! I know an old rope bridge isn't the most stable of things, but it's like Snake was walking on butter. The way he just slid off the side at the slightest tilt of the 3DS was hilarious!"
Tobeh on *Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D*

"Snake Eater 3D is the Metal Gear Solid series' finest hour ported over to Nintendo 3DS"

Want more 3DS? Browse our complete review archive over at **officialnintendomagazine.co.uk**

Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D

Kojima's finest hour gets ported to 3DS. Look beyond the tacked-on Gyro Sensor sections and dodgy framerate and this is an excellent stealth action game.

Tekken 3D: Prime Edition

The third top-quality fighter on the 3DS comes with a huge roster of characters, online multiplayer and a CGI movie, but sadly not much else by way of game modes.

Sonic Generations

Just what the series needed – a reboot of sorts offering both 2D and 3D styles of play. It looks and sounds great, and with classic stages given a modern twist, it's a must for Sonic fans.

Mario Kart 7

Essential for any human with hands, this latest entry in the series ditches the bikes and concentrates on what Mario Kart does best – chaos, colour and a colossal number of courses. Best MK ever.

Resident Evil Revelations

Capcom has done a fantastic job of cramming everything that makes Resident Evil great into this visually stunning survival horror romp. Some brilliantly trashy dialogue, too.

Best Virtual Console

Wario Land: Super Mario Land 3

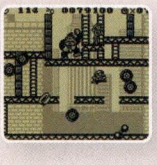
Wario's first starring role is a refreshing change from the Mario Land formula, and plays host to some brilliantly offbeat ideas. A great download for £3.60.

The Legend Of Zelda: Link's Awakening

This Game Boy Color top-down adventure sees our hero washed up on Koholint Island. Strange cameos, weird dialogue and classic Zelda gameplay ensue.

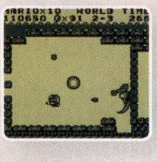
Super Mario Land 2: Six Golden Coins

A giant leap for Mario that showed what the Game Boy could do. The plucky plumber must delve into new worlds, grab six magical coins and defeat evil debutant Wario.



Donkey Kong

A welcome re-release for the evergreen title that adds a few fancy moves to all the best bits from the original game. As much a puzzler as a platformer, the boss fights are great fun and pleasingly varied.



Super Mario Land

Accompany Mario through Sarasaland where he must save Princess Daisy from Tatanga, an evil space alien who wants to take over the region and make her his Queen.

Nintendo Maths

Super Smash Bros.

+

Terrible Controls

=

Cartoon Network: Punch Time Explosion

Pullblox is the very best thing on eShop. Get it now.

Best 3DS eShop

Dillon's Rolling Western

A tower defence game that's a whole lot more interesting than the term 'tower defence' makes it sound. There's enough in here to make it feel like a full-price game.

Freakyforms: Your Creations Alive!

Create your own formees, explore a planet, unlock new body parts and even redesign the world around you in this delightfully bonkers download.

3D Classics: Kid Icarus

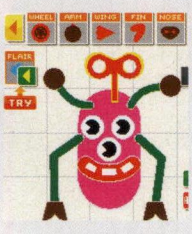
It's really, *really* hard, but for those with plenty of patience this is a rewarding re-working of the NES original with updated graphics and 3D effects. The best in the 3D Classics series so far.

Pullblox

A gem from Intelligent Systems, makers of *Advance Wars* and many other ace eShop downloads. Push and pull the titular blox to make a stairway and reach the top. A truly essential eShop game.

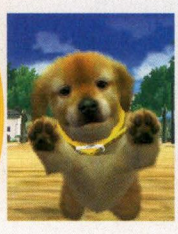
Mighty Switch Force

Cult developer WayForward produces the goods again with this interesting block-switching action platformer. A little too short for our liking, but great fun while it lasts.



"I'm not sure why I'm finding this game so addictive, there's very little point to it and it's pretty weird. It's just fun to mess about on."
Tommson on *Freakyforms*

"I love the art style, and the combination of tower defence, exploration and real-time combat works really well."
Oxo64 on *Dillon's Rolling Western*

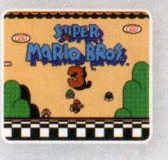


"I will definitely download this! I very much approve of the fact Nintendo are releasing demos for big 3DS games."
JackKuchiki on *Nintendogs + Cats demo*

Wii Essentials

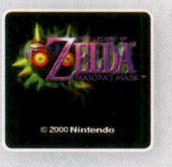
Got a Nintendo Wii? Here are 25 games you need to own...

Best Virtual Console



Super Mario Bros. 3

Up there with *Galaxy 2* and *Super Mario World* as the greatest ever Mario platformers. It is incredibly tough compared to modern games, but that doesn't dampen its brilliance.



The Legend Of Zelda: Majora's Mask

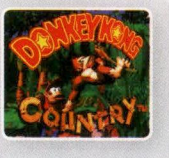
Ocarina's kooky, less well-known follow-up arrived too late in the N64's lifetime to get the success it truly deserved. Link's darkest adventure.

Super Mario Kart

The SNES original, like many of these VC games, is incredibly tough in its later stages, but it is still groundbreaking in its balance of racing and combat. The Battle Mode has never been bettered.

Gunstar Heroes

Retro run-and-gun action on the Mega Drive from cult game makers and shooter specialists, Treasure. This is one game that really deserved all the acclaim it received.



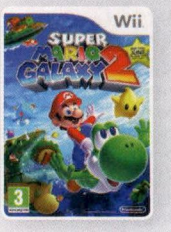
Donkey Kong Country

Rare's revolutionary pre-rendered sprites rather overshadowed the fact that this SNES platformer was a great game in its own right. Rock-hard, too.

Galaxy 2 is Nintendo gaming at its very best.

Kirby's latest adventure is ideal for younger gamers.

Best Platformers

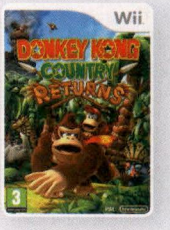


Super Mario Galaxy 2

Still the best platformer on Wii, squeezing even more goodness out of the near-perfect original. It looks incredible, sounds amazing and is challenging enough to last you a very long time.

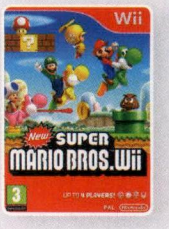
Rayman Origins

This wonderfully witty cartoon romp is a serious contender for Mario's crown. Brilliantly inventive, fantastically playable and the best cartoon visuals the Wii can offer.



Donkey Kong Country Returns

Top-quality platform action that's designed more with the hardcore fan in mind. It is almost as tough as the SNES classics it is based upon.



New Super Mario Bros. Wii

Great fun in single-player, but Mario's most recent side-scroller really comes into its own when you add up to three other players and the rules go out the window.

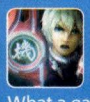
Kirby's Adventure Wii

An utterly charming platformer which teaches *New Super Mario Bros. Wii* a thing or two about four player co-op. Absolutely ideal for gamers of all ages.

Your Shout

The hottest gaming chat on the **ONM** forums this month

Nintendo



"I have finally finished this game! I got it on launch day in August last year and after six months and 150 game hours I have finished it! What a game! I haven't got so involved in a game since... oh, I don't know when. I thought the story was fantastic and I love games with loads of side-quests, because levelling up never feels like a grind."
Grohls6 on *Xenoblade Chronicles*

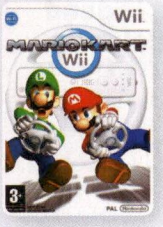
"Team Ninja has packed a great atmosphere and big challenge into Metroid: Other M"

The best Wii debate goes in the mag every month! Head to **officialnintendomagazine.co.uk**

Best For Online

Monster Hunter Tri

A phenomenon in Japan and a real cult favourite over here, *Monster Hunter Tri*'s online community is still going strong. There's plenty of value for money here if you take the plunge.

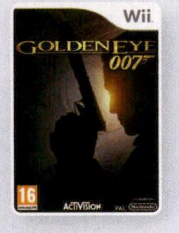


Mario Kart Wii

It may have a family friendly image but head online and *Mario Kart Wii* gets serious. A huge community of Wii owners are waiting for you – and just like local multiplayer, it's a riot.

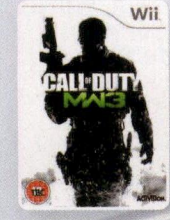
Super Smash Bros. Brawl

It came out way back in 2008, but it's still the game of choice for Wii owners looking to take the fight online. Chaotic scrapping in colourful locales, plus very little lag equals perfection.



GoldenEye

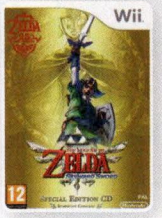
More than does the legendary N64 game justice with a huge range of online play modes and modifiers. There are more than 200 combinations, which is easily enough to keep shooter fans busy.



Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 3

The single-player missions are little more than an excuse for blowing stuff up, but the online multiplayer will have you playing for hundreds of hours.

Best Adventures

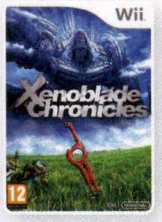


The Legend Of Zelda: Skyward Sword

This constantly surprising adventure progresses at breakneck pace and is an absolute masterpiece by any reckoning. The best adventure game currently available on Wii, no doubt.

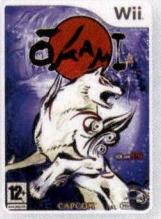
Metroid: Other M

Cutscenes aplenty in this Team Ninja-authored chapter in the Metroid saga which brings you closer to Samus than ever before. A great atmosphere and a big challenge to boot.



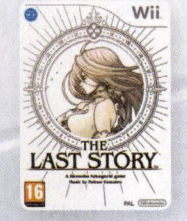
Xenoblade Chronicles

One of the best JRPGs of the last decade, this excellent game retains the best bits of the genre while overhauling to great effect any parts that were in need of a bit of a spruce-up.



Okami

An incredible game that's been criminally overlooked. Gorgeous graphics, a touching storyline and a clever gameplay mechanic that has you drawing commands on-screen using the Wii Remote.



The Last Story

From the creator of Final Fantasy comes this innovative spin on the tried-and-trusted JPRG formula. More action and combat than you might expect couched within a compelling tale of swords and sorcery.

Nintendo Maths

Pokémon

+

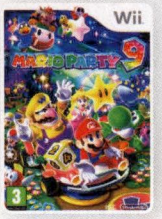
Alton Towers

=

PokéPark 2: Wonders Beyond

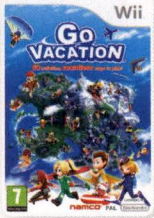
The Last Story is the Wii game of the moment.

Best Family Games



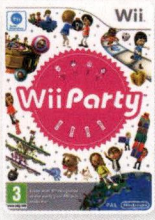
Mario Party 9

A new developer and a raft of improvements over the last title make this ninth game in the series the best yet. Designed specifically for the Wii hardware, this is as good as the party game genre gets.



Go Vacation

This collection of mini-games has you taking part in activities using either your Mii or a preset avatar. It's no *Wii Sports*, but is well made with an impressive single-player mode.



Wii Party

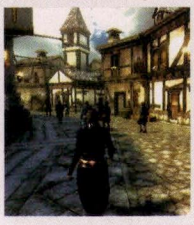
Grab a bunch of Wii Remotes, some younger siblings and waggle away at this Mii-infused spin on the Mario Party formula. Work your way around the board by competing in a fun selection of mini-games.

Mario & Sonic At The London 2012 Olympic Games

The crossover sports title picks up where the Beijing-based game left off, pitting hedgehog against plumber.

Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure

A strong top-down action-adventure game with great co-op and an infectious personality that is let down a little by a pay-to-play system.



"Great to see it selling, it's a brilliant game that deserves to do well. It might have done better if more places had sold it."
imbusydoctorwho on *The Last Story*

"I love this game. I got it in August and have clocked more than 330 hours on it. I've defeated every monster a few times and I'm HR 59."
Yhoooo on *Monster Hunter Tri*

"They need to bring a sequel (well, another one) to the Wii U! The HD and tablet controls would be perfect."
Dan_the_Wii_man on *Okami*

DSi Essentials

Got a Nintendo DSi? Here are 25 games you need to own...

Best Puzzlers

Professor Layton And The Spectre's Call

This set of puzzles wrapped up in a grand, Holmes-style mystery is one of the very best narratives in gaming.

Mario Vs Donkey Kong: Mini-Land Mayhem!

The best Mario Vs. DK game yet, packed with hours of *Lemmings*-style gameplay, charming graphics and retro tunes.

Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective

An ingenious game with a pleasingly smart visual style. Possess objects in order to solve puzzles and discover the mystery surrounding your own death. Pure class.

Super Scribblenauts

Awesomely innovative problem-solving game that manages to improve immeasurably on its so-so predecessor. The decision to split the controls over the stylus and D-Pad was inspired.

Picross 3D

Picross is just as good as *Tetris*, for our money. Use your noggin to chip successfully away at a block of smaller squares to reveal the 3D image underneath. Beginners may want to try *Picross DS* first, though.

Stop this little evil-doer in the epic *Spirit Tracks*.

Bowser's Inside Story is a brilliant, hilarious DS romp.

Best Adventures

Inazuma Eleven

There has never quite been a role-playing game quite like this soccer-themed, anime-style romp in which you must recruit players for greater football glory.

The Legend Of Zelda: Spirit Tracks

Another top-drawer Zelda adventure for the DSi. The storyline is a cracker, it looks sublime and we love the new teamwork dynamic, too.

Pokémon Black/White

The best Pokémon game yet represents the series' biggest step forward since the original *Gold* and *Silver* introduced the internal clock, held items and breeding. A huge, compulsive adventure.

Dragon Quest IX

Every bit as epic as a Zelda game, and just as funny as anything else on the DS. The ninth instalment of Dragon Quest is one of the biggest and best games you'll find anywhere.

Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story

The best in the superb *Mario & Luigi* series of action RPGs. A clever dual gameplay mechanic is the highlight of this gag-filled romp through the Mario universe.

Your Shout

The hottest game chat on the **ONM** forum this month

Nintendo

"It's an absolute masterpiece. I'm not really an RPG person, but I might become one after playing this. I'm enjoying this more than any 3DS game. Can't beat a golden oldie!"

Alex Jones on *Chrono Trigger*

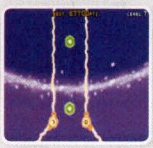
"Herding pink blobs through narrow gaps is trickier than you think in Kirby Mass Attack"

The best DSi debate goes in the mag every month! Head to **officialnintendomagazine.co.uk**

DSiWare Under £2

Bird & Bombs

Fans of *Peggle* will be immediately at home here. Fire the bombs of the title at the right angle to blow up the oddball enemies. Cheap, cheerful and plenty of stages to play through for under two quid.

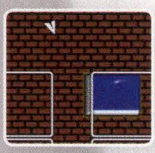


Aura-Aura Climber

Like *Doodle Jump* crossed with a rhythm-action game, this is the very definition of a hidden gem. Lots of content for just £1.80 and an innovative gameplay style. Great stuff.

Pyoro

A spin-off from the WarioWare series, this is an addictive diversion for high score chasers. Try (and eventually fail) to keep gobbling up the falling seeds before they reach the ground with Pyoro's stretchy tongue.



Paper Plane

Another WarioWare spin-off which will have you replaying over and over again to beat your top score. Guide the titular paper plane down through a course of obstacles. It's better than it sounds, honest!

Photo Dojo

Those of you keen on punching and kicking friends and family can do so with *Photo Dojo* without someone calling in the social services. Put you and anyone else in the game with the DSi camera and fight.

Best Platformers

Kirby Mass Attack

Mass Attack is trickier than an ordinary Kirby game; herding Kirbies through narrow gaps, away from explosives and squeezing them into tight spaces requires serious stylus skills.

Yoshi's Island DS

Cheery sequel to an already cheery game. It builds on the original by introducing a bunch of new baby characters, each with their own abilities. Light-hearted, fun and full of charm.

Super Mario 64 DS

Mario made his debut on DS with this remake of a total gaming classic, which adds extra levels, playable characters and mini-games to the mix for a more-than-worthy update of the N64 gem.

Sonic Rush

We've seen a few Sonic platformers on DS, but this first one remains the best. The levels are well designed, the speed and sound effects feel just right, and hardly any cutscenes get in the way of the action.

New Super Mario Bros.

The timeless 2D gameplay of the classic NES and SNES platformers gets a polish in this portable outing, and it makes for a thoroughly joyful gaming experience.

Nintendo Maths

Monkey Island

=

Fun

=

Captain Morgane and the Golden Turtle

Sonic fans need look no further than *Rush* on DS.

Best for Kids

LEGO Pirates Of The Caribbean

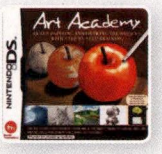
A great choice for the younger gamer. Collectibles, characters and fun cut-scenes make this among the best in the ever-increasing (and excellent) LEGO series.

Animal Crossing

Nintendo's virtual life sim isn't really a game in the conventional sense – it's more an extension of your daily routine. Immerse yourself in a self-built world and you'll be hooked.

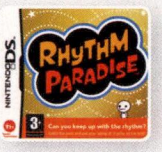
Sonic Colours

Sonic turns rainbow warrior in another fine title. Much closer in style and speed to *Sonic 4*, the emphasis is on furious 2D gameplay. You go mostly right, sometimes left, always stupidly fast... and it's brilliant.



Art Academy

Perfect for younger gamers with an artistic side. *Art Academy* is a comprehensive art package as well as an educational tool which also teaches you new art techniques.



Rhythm Paradise

A collection of weird but brilliant rhythm-based mini-games. Each has its own song that plays in the background and you have to swipe and slice to the beat. Laugh-out-loud funny in places.

"Still after months, my love of RPGs, football and strange people have kept me addicted and I plan to stay like that!"
Joe 'Swifty' Swift on *Inazuma Eleven*

"It's the only game in which I can stomp on buildings and still be considered winning, unless I broke out my Commodore and played *Rampage*"
Richard Bonner on *Advance Wars: Dual Strike*

"It has hours of gameplay, and the mechanics are great! Really have to wonder if there will be another..."
Matthew Umpleby on *Sonic Chronicles*

Hardware Essentials

The definitive guide to Nintendo hardware and accessories

Accessories

+

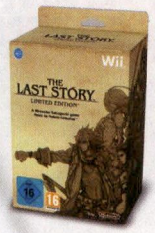
Circle Pad Pro

Co-developed by the boffins at Capcom, this natty add-on latches an extra Circle Pad onto the 3DS, making it easier to play twin-stick-style games.

We Recommend

Kid Icarus Uprising has an option for lefties which allows them to hold the stylus in their preferred paw. Handy.

+



Classic Controller Pro

With two analog sticks, four shoulder buttons and the traditional A, B, X and Y buttons, this is the ideal controller for fans of traditional gaming.

We Recommend

The Last Story is a top quality action adventure game designed to be played without any Wii Remote waggle.

+

Wii Remote Plus

Most new Wii Remotes these days have the fantastic Wii MotionPlus add-on built in, giving you a whole new level of accuracy in games that support it.

We Recommend

Skyward Sword is available now in a bundle with this snazzy gold RemotePlus for extra precise sword-slashing.

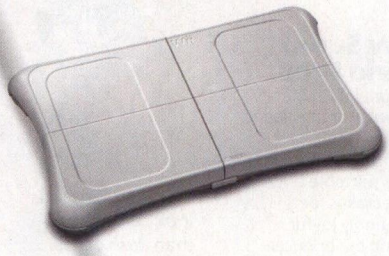
+

Wii Wheel

There's a funky new Wii Wheel bundled with every copy of *Mario Kart Wii*. A good place to start for new or more casual Nintendo gamers.

We Recommend

There's no better game for the Wii Wheel than the magnificent *Mario Kart Wii*. Get it on and get stuck into a racing classic.



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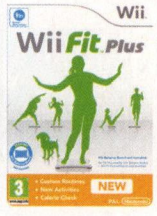


Balance Board

All you new year fitness types would be best off getting hold of a Balance Board. Suitable for all ages and particularly good for the gentler end of exercise.

We Recommend

Wii Fit Plus is the still easily the best use of the Balance Board. It makes working up a sweat 10 times more fun.

Bundles Of Joy

The best hardware deals this month. All prices correct at time of press

Nintendo®

What? Coral Pink 3DS and *Nintendogs + Cats: Golden Retreiver Edition*
Where? play.com **How Much?** £139.99

"Looking to buy a console? Then look no further – here's everything you need to know"

Looking to buy more hardware? Get advice from our community at **officialnintendomagazine.co.uk**

Nintendo Consoles

Nintendo 3DS

The newest Nintendo console to hit the streets, and it's unlike anything you've seen before – a 3D top screen without the need for special glasses, plus StreetPass and SpotPass.

We Recommend

Kid Icarus Uprising has attracted glowing reviews from all corners of the media and it's the perfect demostration of 3DS' tech.

DSi XL

It's the DSi we all know and love, except it's got two huge, beautifully bright and stunningly crisp screens for gaming at home or for playing alongside friends.

We Recommend

Professor Layton And The Spectre's Call is the latest and greatest in the puzzle adventure series, and looks great on those huge screens.

DSi

Smaller, but perfectly formed, DSi is one step up from the classic DS Lite design but slicker to look at, with an SD card slot and two cameras – one internal, one external.

We Recommend

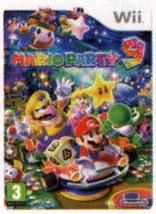
Looking for cute Nintendo-style platforming with a new twist? *Kirby Mass Attack* is the one for you. Great stylus-controlled action on DSi.

DS Lite

DS Lite can be considered the entry-level member of the DS family, and as such can probably be found for a piffling amount online or on the high street.

We Recommend

New Super Mario Bros. is the perfect introduction to gaming. Classic Mario platforming that anyone can play.



Wii

The worldwide phenomenon that brought gaming to a wider audience than ever before. It comes with the now-legendary motion-sensing Wii Remote controller.

We Recommend

Gather the entire family around the TV for a spot of *Mario Party 9* and you're guaranteed brilliant multiplayer mini-game larks.

Step By Step

Watch Nintendo TV on 3DS

Step 1
Make sure your 3DS is connected to the internet via Wi-Fi through the system settings menu.

Step 2
Tap on the little orange bag icon on your 3DS's Home Screen and get yourself over to eShop.

Step 3
From here you should be able to find the familiar Nintendo TV logo among the front page icons.

Step 4
Tap on the icon and your 3DS will stream the latest episode. You can view old NTV episodes, too.

What? Cosmos Black 3DS with *Mario Kart 7*
Where? direct.tesco.com
How much? £159.00

What? Ice White 3DS with *Super Mario 3D Land*
Where? amazon.co.uk
How much? £149.99

What? Aqua Blue 3DS
Where? game.co.uk
How much? £134.99

Final Countdown

The Top 10 Rejected *Pandora's Tower* Plots*

"Hearts again? Really? Because I know this great sushi place around the corner... no? Fine (sigh)."

10 Curse Of The Poisoned Grape

During the annual grape-eating festival, Princess Elena eats a cursed grape that contains the ghost of an evil Victorian dog. She slowly begins to transform into a monocle-wearing Yorkshire Terrier. Aeron, a young soldier from the Elysium Kingdom, must reverse her metamorphosis by visiting 13 haunted vineyards across the land and defeating the beasts that lurk within.

9 Cursed Serviette

While on a British Airways flight to Hong Kong, Elena, having finished her ham and cheese sandwich, dabs her lips with a cursed serviette and slowly begins to transform into an aeroplane. Aeron, a fellow passenger, must press 13 flight attendant buttons to undo the curse and return Elena to her original human form.

8 Cursed Pigeon Poo

As Elena is walking through Marylebone railway station, the ancient and evil god Alhotep (who has taken the form of a feral pigeon) drops a sticky mess on her shoulder. The poo is *extremely* cursed, and she begins to transform into one of those horrible pigeons that have nubs instead of feet. Aeron has to pop into Boots to pick up the cure, which costs £7.85 over the counter.

7 Cursed Goat

At Whipsnade's petting zoo, Elena unwittingly strokes a cursed goat. She's so upset that she accidentally hugs a double-cursed rabbit and immediately begins to inflate. To lift the curse, Aeron must make out with the cursed goat for 13 minutes in front of absolutely everybody. Elena tells him off afterwards for kissing goats.

6 Cursed Scene

In an attempt to avoid further curses, Elena and Aeron stay in to watch *The Social Network* on Netflix. But while Aeron is fetching some Pringles from the kitchen, Elena watches a cursed scene. By the time Aeron returns, she is already half-Mark Zuckerberg, half-princess. Aeron must mutter something passive-aggressive about attention-seeking under his breath to lift the curse.

Elena: quite the catch, if you dig cursed chicks.

Chin up my love, we'll do sushi next time. Now give us a smile and finish your hearts.

5 Cursed Armchair

Shopping for a new sofa, Elena sits in a cursed armchair and transforms into a heavily discounted three-piece suite. Before Aeron can react, Elena has been bought by a young couple who've just moved into their first home.

4 Cursed Song

Elena listens to a cursed Fleet Foxes song on 6music and now cannot stop tunelessly singing the same two lines at Aeron, who has given up smiling faintly at the lyrics, which Elena says are about her. She starts crying.

3 Cursed New Job

It's Elena's first day at her new job as an intern at a PR agency. Aeron receives a phone call from her at half past two. "Can you pick me up? I hate it here and I think I've got, like, five new curses." She quits to focus on her art.

2 Cursed Ex-Girlfriend

Aeron receives a text from his ex-girlfriend. Elena claims to have a new curse, the cure to which is Aeron never talking to his ex-girlfriend again. She throws his phone across the room, shrugs and says, "Curse."

1 Cursed Whisk

A tired Aeron goes for a couple of drinks with some colleagues after work. When he returns home later that evening, Elena has fully transformed into a whisk. "Why did you leave me here?" the whisk says. ✚

See you next month!

Next issue on sale

Thursday 3 May

*Not really, we've made them all up.

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